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TILLIE FELL FORWARD UPON THE NEW GRAVE, AND WEPT AS SHE HAD NEVER WEPT BEFORE.

The Girl Wife; or, The True and the False.

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CHAPTER I.

MAN AND WIFE.

It was a dark October night, a little raw and exceedingly disagreeable. The rain had been falling in a vexatious drizzle all day, and the wind that came up from the east, a little before sunset, drove it in wreaths of mist and spray from the great rolling river over the low-lying Crescent City.

The sails of the clusters of ships huddled below Canal street were drenched, and shook dismally, and dripped steadily, in a dreary way, until the shadows of night brought a calm, and hid them from view. Then the lights—red and green—twinkled from the smoke-stacks of the steamboats and glared through the fog and rain from the high decks of ocean crafts.

It was an ugly night on the river; but, notwithstanding, there were plenty of open boats afloat, from Carrollton to the grim-looking, but now deserted, Mint.

In one of these boats sat a young man, dressed in deep black—his handsome face more than half concealed by a broad-brimmed slouched hat, which may have been worn partly for the purpose of concealment, and partly to guard his face from the storm.

He pushed out from the foot of Natchez street boldly into the stream, and with far-reaching strokes, pulled down the river, heading his tiny

THE GIRL WIFE.

vessel for the right bank. Down past the rows of steamers and stacks of freight piled high upon the levee; down past the fringe of gas-lights winking through the fog; down past Algiers, half-hidden under the bank; nothing to be heard all this time, save the roar on the river and the rattle of the oars.

Finally the man stopped rowing and glanced toward the right bank. He was within fifty feet of the levee, and could see the shore distinctly.

"That's it. I thought it could not be far from here," he said, backing water with his right oar and pulling with the other.

A black Bremen steamship was anchored between the skiff and the land, and seemed to raise its big bulk up out of the water to bar the frail craft's way.

The young man looked at the huge monster, and then exclaiming—"Drat the Dutch hulk! I'll have to go below her," suffered the skiff to drop down with the current.

When he could see the light on her stern he plied the oars lustily, and in a few moments had landed.

Leaping ashore, he dragged the skiff up on the sand, and, taking the oars upon his shoulders, stalked away toward a cabin that stood about a hundred yards from the river.

It was a humble-looking abode, standing in the center of a huge cane-field, and on the night of which we write looked very lonely indeed, isolated as it was, and shabby, too.

A light was gleaming from the window that looked out upon the river, and when the young man saw this, he muttered:

"Watching for me as usual, eh? Ah! I wish I hadn't this matter on hand. It's an unpleasant job, but fortune has been fickle with me, and has ruined my constancy, and conscience, too."

When he reached the cabin, he looked in through the window, and beheld a young girl seated by a bright fire of drift. She was a beautiful girl; there could be no mistake about that. Eyes large, dewy, and blue as summer skies; skin white as moonbeams; and a lithe, graceful, girlish figure, that looked dainty and pretty even in the faded alpaca which she wore.

"Pretty as ever," said the stranger; and then he dropped his oars, and, turning the knob of the door, entered.

"Oh, Mark, dear, is that you?" She was upon her feet in an instant, her face beaming with a new light, and her scarlet mouth all smiles and dimples.

He put his arm around her in a familiar, lover-like way, and kissed her. "What have you been doing?"

"Waiting for you, darling."

"That all?"

"Yes, that's all I've done since dark."

"You might have been better employed, then. Looking and waiting for a miserable creature like me is not very profitable work."

A shade of doubt and fear passed over the girl's face as she looked up into that of her companion.

"Oh, Mark, what do you mean? What's happened? You frighten me!"

"I almost frighten myself when I stop to think. I'm ruined—disgraced—that's all! Ain't it enough?"

"Disgraced! How? Tell me." She put up her arms about his neck, coaxingly.

"Well, the long and short of it is just this: I have been betting against the bank in a Gravier street gambling-hell, off and on, for a week back. My winnings were large at first, but since Thursday luck has been against me, and I've lost a round ten thousand. You see, Tillie, I've been going it, and now, on this blessed Saturday night, I'm five thousand worse than nothing."

"But you can borrow—"

"No, no," waving his hand. "I've done that, and worse—a good deal worse."

"Worse, Mark Blanchard! Surely you have not committed a theft?"

"Not exactly. I'm too much of a gentleman for that, you know, but I've forged my Uncle Gabriel's name for five thousand dollars. Don't stare, Tillie. I had to have the money, and I could not get it in any other way."

The girl was deathly pale now, and trembled as if with ague as she said:

"And, Mark, what—what do you propose to do?"

"Well, to tell you frankly, I've made up my mind to try a foreign climate for a while. I'm going to Mexico to-night."

"To-night? Oh, Mark! you are not going without me, are you? You won't leave me behind? I'd die without you, dearest, I know I would." She wound her arms tighter about him, and looked appealingly.

He caught both her hands in his, and looked an instant into her face, saying, at length:

"You must have sense now, Tillie. This is no time for sentiment, with only that river there between Captain Cain and his hungry police and I, and a gloomy State prison in the background. I don't fancy Baton Rouge much as a place of residence. That I may escape that, I've determined to go to Mexico this very night."

"Then I will go with you to-night, Mark. We shall never be separated. I am your wife, and nothing should part man and wife."

"Neither shall any thing part us, darling. But, remember this: I have to go at once; must make my way through the swamps in order to dodge the police, and I'm afraid you would not add to my chances of escape much."

"And you are going to leave me, then? Oh, Mark, darling, I can not stand that. It will kill me."

He smoothed her bright hair back until it fell in a torrent of gold over her shoulders.

"The alternative is not pleasant," he said, at length, "and I would do any thing—make any sacri-

fice—to avoid it, save my liberty. I could not live ten years in a State prison, darling; that would kill me, you see; and I know my little rosebud could not live after that. Now, which do you think best—go to Mexico and have you join me there in a few weeks, or go up the river? Look up now. Decide."

There was a moment's silence; broken only by the sobs of the girl, and he continued:

"Go on, darling; decide; time is precious."

She looked up now through her tears.

"I don't know what to say; what do you propose?"

"Just this. I will slip off to-night, and when I reach the other side of the Rio Grande, I will send for you. After a while uncle Gabriel will forgive me, and we will return, and I will acknowledge you as my wife. You see, the case is not so desperate, if only a little tact is displayed in the management of details."

"And how long will all this take?" asked Tillie, still weeping bitterly.

"A year or two. Come, we will not think the time long once we are united in Mexico. I can make a fortune in the mines, for that matter, while in exile."

They talked a long while, and, at length, he succeeded in winning the girl over to his view of the matter.

When he had done so he said, all at once, "Where is Pettis and Sallie?"

"In the next room," answered Tillie. "I guess they have gone to bed. Do you want to see Pettis?"

"No; there is no necessity for that. You can give the old couple this purse," handing a wallet; "it will pay them for your board, and insure your good treatment until I send for you."

She took the purse mechanically, and said: "Oh, Mark Blanchard, you don't know, can never guess, how much I love you. I have left my poor old father lonely and wretched away up there in Tennessee because I loved you better than all the world, and because I trusted you. You will be true to me; you will repay that devotion by truthfulness and loyalty; you will not, no matter what may come, desert me. Will you, Mark?"

A shadow passed over Mark Blanchard's face. This appeal had touched him; yes, heartless, sordid as he was, that petition had reached his heart. He was evidently wavering. He could not carry out his bold, bad design, which was intended to crush out all the happiness of that poor girl's life. A vision of a happy home on the Cumberland, in the heart of the iron mines, came up out of the glowing fire; of a wretched old pair; of an empty chair.

He was fast melting. He gathered the girl closer to him, and kissed her passionately.

"Good-by, Tillie! Good-by!"

The cabin door opened and closed again; a dark form went off in the darkness toward the misty river, and Tillie was lying, sobbing out her anguish.

CHAPTER II.

PLOTTING AND THE PLOTTERS.

WHEN Mark Blanchard left the cabin, he betook himself at once to his boat again. After he had turned from the shore, and was, perhaps, a yard or two out in the stream, he paused a moment, as in thought; then he rowed on again a short distance and stopped, still undecided.

"Perhaps I had better see Silas, to-night," he thought, "or while I am in this tender mood, my courage may forsake me, if I do not resort to some potent stimulant. Yes, I'll go."

He spoke the last words boldly and in a loud voice; so loud in fact, that he was startled himself. What if some person had overheard? But there was little to fear from that; the rain was beating its even tattoo upon the river, and nothing could be seen but the distant lights of the great city.

The prow of the boat was turned quartering down the stream, and the young man bent steadily to the oar. He was perfectly soaked with the falling rain when he stepped ashore, at last, and looked around.

"Ah, to be sure! there's the old Port Market, and there, right across in that old ruin, my friend and helmate resides. A nice place for a man's friend to live, and a nice place for a nice young man like Mark Blanchard to be prowling around after midnight."

All the time he was speaking he was walking away from the river, leaving the rickety old Port Market, black as a huge beetle, with its clumsy outstretched wings and rows of legs, to his left.

Opposite the market a row of tall, grim-looking houses stood. From the first floor of one of these a ray of light struggled out upon the pavements. Blanchard stopped in front of this house and looked in at the open doorway. A screen, on which was painted a ship in full sail, prevented him from catching a sight of the bar-room, but he could hear the sound of a great many voices, and occasionally the clink of glasses and snatches of songs in French and Spanish, and he knew the tap-room was full of maudlin sailors, representing almost every nationality in the universe.

Placing his fingers in his mouth, he gave three long, sharp whistles.

The sound had scarce died away when the screen was pushed aside, and a large, muscular man stepped briskly forward. He was dressed in a suit of black, fashionably cut and well-fitting, his shirt collar turning low down upon his neck, and a large neckerchief tied jaunily, but loosely, an inch or two below the upper button. His shirt bosom was a mass of ruffles, and a small emerald pin gleamed amid the snowy meshes.

"Hello, my boy!" he exclaimed, as soon as his eyes rested upon Blanchard. "What's the row?"

"I want to see you, Silas, about that little affair across the river."

"The d—l you do. Well, speak out. I'm always ready to talk business, or help a friend in a scrape or out of one."

"I don't like to tell you every thing here," said Mark, glancing uneasily around. "Can't we go upstairs?"

"Of course we can. Follow me." The man who was called Silas now stepped to a dingy looking hall-door, and taking out a night-key opened it.

"Rather dark in there," remarked Blanchard, hesitating to follow his companion.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid. Here, give me your hand. Now grip the baluster and hold to it all the way up."

Blanchard obeyed, and was soon mounting the creaking stairs.

They stopped at the third landing and groped their way along a gloomy hall. Presently they paused before a door, through the key-hole of which a ray of light penetrated into the darkness.

Silas rapped on the door and called out:

"Mangy! Mangy!"

Presently the door was softly opened, and the two men walked into a brilliantly lighted room. Daintily-flowered carpets, soft-cushioned sofas and tall, gilded mirrors, looked brighter and better after that tramp through the dark, wet night and through the bare halls of that crazy old building.

"By Jove! Silas, you have things fixed nicely up here," said Mark, as soon as he had crossed the threshold.

"Why, you don't think I'd live any way else do you—leastwise, as long as Mangy stays here?"

Blanchard now, for the first time, was aware of the presence in the room of a tall, graceful girl. She was seated on a sofa beside the door when his eyes fell upon her, her hands folded idly upon her lap, and her dark luminous eyes were looking up into his, with a questioning gaze.

Her complexion was of the brownish-olive, and from her low forehead drifts of purplish-black hair were rolled back into a coil, that looked very much like an ebon crown.

Her shapely form was robed in the finest cashmere, and a cluster of gems held the ends of a collar of real lace, where her delicately rounded throat ended.

She colored slightly, as she met Mark's gaze, and dropped her eyes shyly.

"You needn't blush, Mangy," said Silas, bluntly. "Mister Blanchard is a married man, or, leastwise, is going to be—which, darling, is all the same, you know."

"This lady is not Mrs. Norman then?" asked Blanchard.

"Well, I rather think not, seeing she ain't Missus at all. That's my daughter, Mark; and, Mangy, this is my old friend Blanchard."

The young girl bowed in recognition of the introduction, and Mark could not help noting how graceful she was.

"As the captain here has some private business with me," continued Silas, "you may go to bed, Mangy."

The girl arose, and bidding the two men good-night, left them.

"Splendid girl," exclaimed Silas. "Always waits up for me. Would never go to bed if I would not come up here and tell her to do so. Beautiful as an angel, and docile as a lamb. Don't often meet such girls, captain, in New Orleans."

"No, and rarely anywhere else," answered Mark; "but I never knew you had a daughter, Norman. Where has the girl been kept?"

"Well, up at Saint Genevieve. I've had her schooled up there, but I brought her home for a week or two, and I intend to send her over to Biloxi for the summer. You see, Cap, this is not the kind of a place for a good girl, and I would not have her find out how cussed mean her father is for the world—no, siree! not for the world."

There was a moment's silence. At length Mark said, rubbing his hands together as he spoke:

"Well, Silas, I have taken your advice so far; I have seen Tillie to-night, and your trumped-up story served the purpose well. To tell the whole truth, though, I nearly broke down a couple of times, I'm so tender-hearted, and hate scenes so."

Silas Norman smiled derisively as he listened, and when Mark had finished, answered:

"Yes, you're very tender-hearted—all young 'uns are; but, when you 'ave seen as much of the world's cunning deceit as I have, you'll be as tired of chicken-hearted people as I am."

"You can't blame a fellow for feeling badly at parting with his lawful wedded wife for the last time—can you?"

"Well, no," answered Silas; "it's a tough matter, I'll confess; but, you see there is a cool hundred thousand dollars and Miss Blanche Davenant on the opposite side of the scale. Nothing like gold, to outweigh love and nonsense. But, tell me, what did you say to-night?"

"I told her," Mark replied, "that I had forged uncle Gabriel's name for a large amount; that I was forced to leave the city; that I had chosen Mexico for my future residence, and that, in a fortnight, I would send a man after her, and that we should be reunited again west of the Rio Grande."

"Did you tell her who the man would be?"

"No. You know you was not sure Turner would do the business, and I thought it would be better not to say anything about it. It leaves us free to make other arrangements."

"Very cute," and Norman winked slightly at his companion. "It's a pity your talents have not been exercised more fully. Deception seems to come quite natural to you."

"Rather a dubious compliment, Norman, but, I suppose you're right. However, when I get rid of

Tillie, and find myself master of old Davenant's ducats and old Davenant's daughter, I'll join church and lead a model life."

"Repent, eh?"

"Yes; do works meet for repentance, at least. But, have you spoke to Turner yet?"

"Not yet; he's a little flush now, made a winning at the 'Polka' last night, and Turner's one of those kind of fellows it don't do to arrange with when he's flush."

"High priced when flush, I suppose?"

"No, not that. Now, you wouldn't believe it, but it's a fact, he gets pious, or honorable as he calls it, whenever his pocketbook is heavy."

"But, when he's short of funds?"

"Well, then, he is ready for anything. Ah, Blanchard! poverty is the worst of vices. You'll find that out if you live long enough."

"It strikes me," said Mark, after a pause, "that Turner is not the right kind of a man for this job."

"Why not?"

"Well, in the first place, this is one of those peculiar jobs that no man with a conscience, or too fine a sense of honor, can undertake. And if Turner should betray us, I would have to leave New Orleans for certain, and no mistake."

"Right—quite right. But I know my man. I'll bet on his word if he gives it once; and, besides, I have got claims upon him that make him my slave, and he is so genteel, and looks so honest! Any woman would believe Turner on his shape. Nothing like a polished exterior, my boy; you know that."

Blanchard assented, and then said: "Norman, I'll make it a thousand dollars if you manage this thing discreetly."

The two men clasped hands, and Norman simply said:

"Good!"

"When can I see you again, Silas?"

"Well, say the night after to-morrow night. I'll meet you at the Polka."

"All right. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Norman.

Blanchard stepped out into the dark hall, and Silas stood in the doorway of the room in which they had sat until the visitor groped his way to the head of the stairs; then, turning on his heel, he muttered:

"What a precious scoundrel you are, Mr. Mark Blanchard, Esquire—what a precious scoundrel!"

The last words were spoken slowly and aloud, and then Silas Norman threw himself upon a sofa at full length, and began to think—to think of the past, that had such a terror for him.

CHAPTER III.

A PAGE FROM THE PAST.

On the following morning Mark Blanchard arose quite early, and dressed very carefully. He was an orphan, and resided with his uncle Gabriel Blanchard, at the latter's splendid residence, on Charles street, almost a mile west of Tivoli Circle, where the orange and magnolia blend their fruits and blossoms from June to January, in beautiful profusion, and where the air is heavy with delicious scents.

Mark was fortunate in being the favorite of a bachelor uncle, who was as rich as he was irritable, and who had been used so long to having undisputed sway over the fortunes of his nephew that he at length regarded him pretty much in the same light as he would any other piece of human property attached to his estate.

This, of course, was very galling to a young man of Mark's wayward disposition, but a rupture with his uncle meant poverty, and Mark was too luxuriant in his tastes to ever think of giving up his brilliant expectations.

It was his uncle Gabriel who had taken him from his mother's dying arms; it was his uncle Gabriel who had paid for his tuition at Dartmouth, and it was his uncle Gabriel's plan and hope that he should wed the youngest child of his old friend, Richard Davenant.

Blanche was young, beautiful and an heiress. Gabriel Blanchard would have doted upon a woman like her in his youth, and it was but natural he concluded that the taste of his nephew would run in the same channel.

Colonel Davenant resided, during the summer, on his plantation on the Bayou La Fourche, but the winter months were spent at his city residence, in the most exclusive part of that very exclusive neighborhood, of which Prytania street is the center.

On the night of the day of which we write, Blanche Davenant was to give his first party of the season. It was to be a select affair; only the cream of the Creole city was to be honored with invitations, and very few regrets were to be expected.

Everybody knew that Mark Blanchard had secured the heiress, and those who were most intimate even knew that the wedding would take place on the following Christmas Eve; therefore, the beaux turned their eyes and compliments to other shrines, and belles felt, when they looked upon the stylish Mark, that he was beyond the reach of speculation, just the same as if the marriage rites had been solemnized.

Now, it might be thought that Mark Blanchard felt proud on this morning, and perhaps happy, too; but, nothing could well be further from the truth. He was very miserable. The coming *fête* was to prove his power to dissemble. In the glitter and glare of fashion he hoped to drown all the memories of his deserted wife. That he would be equal to the occasion he very much doubted. He admired Blanche, but he loved, as devotedly as he was capable of loving anybody, the poor confiding child whom he had won but six months before.

Had not his uncle set his heart on this new alliance, he would have been true to Tillie Maynard. But he

had never openly disobeyed his uncle, and his secret marriage, were it to become known, he felt sure would disinherit him.

Work for his living, with his dainty white hands, he could not. He could gamble, he could lie, he could deceive; but labor was a step nearer social degradation than he cared to take; and so his marriage vows were forgotten, and the wife of a few months was worse than widowed.

With the glad October sunshine streaming in a yellow flood about him, through the open window, and the carols of the mocking-birds in his ears, and all around him luxury and splendor, he felt a pang of regret for Tillie.

"Poor Tillie," he muttered; "I will see to it that you shall not suffer for the comforts of life. You shall share the price of the sacrifice, and I know I'll not be wholly free from the pain. I do wonder if she'll suffer much? Norman's plan of having me killed off is a capital idea; it will turn her thoughts in a new direction when she has nothing but the grave and eternity to look to."

There was a shuffling, shambling tread on the soft-carpeted stairs; then the door was softly opened, and a bright mulatto girl put her head in at the chink.

"Mas'r Mark, the gub'nor is waitin' breakfast, I see sent up for you, sah."

"Tell the governor I'll be down in a jiffy, Mattie."

"In a what, sah?"

"Confound you, in a jiffy—in a moment. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, sah, in a jibby. May I, please Mas'r Mark, may I help you wid it?"

"Help me with what? Are you taking leave of your senses?"

"No, sah. It's o't I might give some 'sistance downsta's wid dat t'ing."

"What thing? Confound it; what are you talking about?"

"De jibby. I's mighty strong, Mas'r Mark."

The young man smiled, and said: "I guess I'll manage it myself, Mattie. You can go."

The woolly-head disappeared, and Mark Blanchard sighed as he said: "I don't know what's the reason everybody likes me, even to that poor ignorant nigger. I used to feel proud of this, but now I am so unworthy of love and kindness, that every attention appears to wound rather than please me."

He looked into the mirror on the ivory mantelpiece, gave a few strokes to his silken mustache, and then whistling an aria from "Martha," went down to the elegant breakfast-room where his uncle awaited him.

Gabriel Blanchard was a gentleman of sixty-five, with stylish side-whiskers of a sheeny, silvery hue, and large, kindly blue eyes. His mouth, too, was large, and his chin was broad and massive, evincing the strength of will which was his chief characteristic.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, uncle. I hope the old gentleman's appetite is not impaired, however," said Mark, as he approached the table, at which his uncle was already seated.

Gabriel looked up. He did not smile, but after a pause, answered:

"No, thanks to a vigorous constitution, and the good care I had the sense to bestow upon it, my appetite is not easily destroyed. Had I indulged in as late hours as my nephew does, I, doubtless, would not have this to say at sixty-five."

The young man bit his lips, and answered hesitatingly: "I had business to transact away down in the First District last night, and that accounts for my absence to such a late hour."

"I am not angry, Mark," said Gabriel, evidently not pleased at the apology, and the manner of his protege; but, a young man contemplating matrimony, should train himself to early hours. Fast young men are by no means desirable husbands, and Miss Davenant is very particular in this respect. You are very fortunate in securing such a wife."

"I shall endeavor to make her happy; that's all I can do, uncle," replied the younger man, seating himself at the breakfast table.

"I am glad to hear you say so. It shows a proper spirit, and I know you can make her happy, too. Do you know, Mark, had you chosen any other girl in Louisiana, your income would have been curtailed, at least, five thousand a year? But, as you have displayed such excellent taste, and done honor to the judgment of the Blanchards, I have made up my mind to settle upon you a snug sum. What do you say to one hundred thousand and the Placquemine plantation?"

"Oh, my dear uncle!" exclaimed Mark, "you really take away my breath. I am not deserving of this—upon my word, I—"

"There, there, now, I have said it, and it shall be so."

The young man's face glowed with a new light, and he was about to pour forth a fresh stream of thanks, when Gabriel motioned him to remain silent, saying, in a low voice, and with an uneasy glance around the room:

"But, there is a reservation in favor of another person, or persons, and it is of this I wish now to speak to you."

Again the old man glanced around, as if fearful of being overheard, and then added:

"Let's go to the library; I can not tell you here."

They arose, and passing through a long corridor, entered a sumptuously furnished apartment. The furniture was of ebony, and the walls were lined with heavily carved book-cases, filled with volumes in fine calf and expensive morocco.

The old man pointed his nephew to a seat, and sinking into one himself, threw his head back and looked up at the ceiling for a moment or two.

At length he said:

"I am not, or, at least, I was not always, a crusty old fellow, such as most people believe me to be. I have a heart somewhere which all these years of money-making has not made callous, and once—it appears now a great many years ago—I gave all the wealth of love that heart contained to a poor orphan girl in Virginia. She did not return my passion, but gave herself to another."

"This, of course, maddened me; and *sint* months after she became his wife, I made her a widow."

Mark Blanchard started and looked frightened. Gabriel, noticing this, continued:

"But, I did not murder him; we met as equals; the chances were rather against me, but I came out victor. My bullet penetrated his left side, and while he lay dying in the arms of his friends, I fled from Roanoke to the West Indies."

"And the widow?" put in Mark.

"Poor Sybil; I never had the heart to inquire whether she lived or died."

There were tears in Gabriel Blanchard's eyes as he continued: "That's twenty years ago, and, as I have said, it appears quite forty of them. I have kept my secret, well, for it never crossed my lips before."

"And why have you told me this now, uncle?" asked Mark.

"Because I want to make a reservation in my will in favor of Sybil Grainer, if she is living, at my death, or in favor of her heirs in case she is not."

"But, not until your death, uncle?"

"Not until my death. I could not bear to favor her or hers until the grave lifts its shade between us. Oh, Mark Blanchard, my life has been a weary one; God knows how weary."

"No doubt, dear uncle," answered Mark; "but what am I to do in case of your early demise? Tell me."

"Search out Sybil Grainer, and give her twenty thousand dollars. Will you do this?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

"Swear it."

The young man lifted a Bible, and kissing it, said, solemnly: "I swear!"

CHAPTER IV.

A FETE.

THERE was a flash of lights, and the sweet music of woman's laughter, in the Davenant mansion; and the hurry of dancing feet, and the melody of harp and violin. Polite servants of every shade, from yellow to ebon, in the daintiest of white aprons and jackets, bowed and smiled a welcome to a legion of aristocratic guests, and still the carriages rolled up to the broad colonnade, and still beautiful women whisked noisy silks and stiff brocades in through the open doorway, and tall men in starch and broad-cloth served as foil to all this gorgeous display.

In the largest of the two reception-rooms, which were thronged with gallantry and beauty, stood Blanche Davenant. She was a girl a little above the medium height, with eyes of the softest, tenderest blue, and skin white as a falling snow-flake. Rather slender, she was yet rounded in the full bloom of young womanhood, and the heavy coils of golden hair, wrapped in a coronet of exquisite grace about her well-poised head, gave her whole person a queenly bearing.

A long, flowing robe of sky-blue silk, with only a single diamond at her throat, enhanced her appearance not a little, and perhaps increased the admiration which was almost general.

Her father stood by her side, and welcomed his and his daughter's friends as they arrived, with that grace which is almost habitual to the cultivated Southern gentleman.

"Who is that, papa, just entering? Look there!"

Blanche had only time to make this remark, and her parent had not time to answer, when a handsome man, and the subject of the remark, stepped briskly forward and bowed to Colonel Davenant.

"My daughter, Major Cecil," said Colonel Davenant.

Major Cecil's brown eyes were full of admiration as he said, in a playful way:

"I am sincerely glad to renew an acquaintance which seems so much a part of that past which was so very pleasant to me."

Blanche looked up surprised, and colored a little, and then her father, seeing her embarrassment, said:

"Blanche, dear, don't you remember Major Cecil, whom we met in Florence, ten years ago, and who carried you through the excavation at Pompeii, and was so very attentive to you at Bonn?"

Blanche did remember, but it was only faintly, for she was only a child of eight then, and the memory was only like the rhythm of a half-forgotten poem—sweet and dreamy, like Italy itself.

"Yes, I think I remember Major Cecil," she said, smiling, "though I've always thought of him as Captain Cecil."

"Only a captain when we were companions abroad," replied Cecil; "but promotion, as well as years, followed that trip."

They went off together, she leaning upon his arm; wandering through the festive throng, she happy, and he very proud.

As they passed out of one of the open windows, through the frostwork of the lace, and into the garden, Major Cecil said, earnestly:

"Where has my little friend spent all those years since last we met? At school or in the nursery?"

"I hope I've outgrown the last, and have a year or two, at least, between me and the first," replied Blanche, banteringly. "You must know, major, I'm a woman now—a responsible, full-grown person!"

There was something sad in his voice as he said:

"Ah! true; it's a great many years; I had almost forgotten that."

After a pause, he added: "Have you thought ever, I mean—of me in all this time?"

"Of course, major, a great deal. I used to tell the girls at school about my soldier lover. You must pardon me for this, but, you know, *lover* is not a very meaning word as school-girls understand it."

"Ans!" said Cecil, almost passionately, "have thought more about my little tourist than I would like to tell, even to herself."

This sounds very much like love-making, Blanche thought; and remembering her promise to become Mark Blanchard's wife, she trembled with a new fear. What if she did not love Mark? She did not know, for a certainty, that she did, and now she felt, for the first time since her betrothal, how very easy it would be to love some one else! Her courtship had had precious little romance in it; it was wholly unlike what she had imagined courtships to be, and was not very unlike a business contract void of any thing like ennobling sentiment. Yet still she was a promised wife; and, understanding her duty, she said, promptly:

"Major Cecil, we had better go in, I think, or I will be false to my position of hostess."

"I hadn't thought of that," he replied. "Yes, let's go."

As they entered the drawing-room, Mark came forward, and said rather pettishly: "I've been looking for you, Blanche, and I couldn't think where you had gone."

"We were only in the garden," answered Blanche. "This is Major Cecil, Mark—an old friend of the family."

Mark bowed distantly, and after the exchange of a few commonplaces, led his affianced off to join a quadrille just forming.

During the evening Cecil paid marked attention to the little hostess, but left early, promising to call in a day or two at furthest.

"I don't like that man," said Mark, as soon as the major was gone.

"Why?" asked Blanche, looking up, surprised. "He is an old and valued friend of the family."

"Tush! I hate old friends! There is always deceit and mischief in them." He was scowling now, and Blanche thought him—for the first time in her life—exceedingly repulsive.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

AFTER the departure of Mark Blanchard from Silas Norman's room, on the night on which our story opens, the girl who answered to the name of Mangy returned to the apartment which she had left, on Mark's entrance.

She walked directly to the sofa on which her father lay, and, folding her arms across her breast, looked sternly down upon him.

"Well, Mangy! what's up now?" he said, rising to a sitting posture.

She didn't answer at once, but when she did speak, it was bitterly, and her words were:

"Silas Norman, can it be possible you will lend yourself to the aid of a villain, such as that fellow who has just left here?"

"Why, Mangy, what are you talking about? That fellow, as you call him, is a gentleman. He's worth his cool million, if he is worth a cent."

"Were he as rich as Croesus, he would be nothing but a low, sneaking, contemptible villain."

"That's rough language, Miss Magdalen Norman, to one of your father's best friends," replied the man, looking carelessly up at her.

"No, Silas Norman; bad as you are—bad as we both are—we are not on a level with that fellow. We need money, but not his—we are not so low as that yet!"

The man's face was growing scarlet as he answered: "It is an ugly job, Mangy, but, you know we can't be always particular. For that matter, the fellow can't help himself very well. His precious old uncle is forcing him to do it."

"Forcing him to leave his poor wife—an unfortunate wretch, whose only crime is loving such a scoundrel as Mark Blanchard! What do you think will become of this poor woman when she wakes up in a foreign land to the realization of her true position—the deserted wife of a mean, low creature, who has not the heart to perpetrate a brave crime?"

"Why, Mangy, you talk like a stage-player, but you had better have a care that you do not act. You must not attempt to dictate to me."

He said this sternly, and looked hard at her. She didn't tremble, however, nor shrink, but glared back at him, saying:

"I have made up my mind what to do."

"And what is that?"

"You'll see."

"I will—will I?"

"Yes, you will."

He closed one of his eyes, and lifting the index finger of his right hand, he said, slowly, as if measuring the importance of every word:

"Now, my lady, I'm getting tired of this hifalutin business, and I want you to understand this distinctly, that, if you interfere in this affair, in opposition to my plans, I'll kill you! Do you understand that?"

"Yes, I understand; but, I don't care if you kill me now."

"You don't, eh?"

"No, I don't! What, in Heaven's name, have I to live for? The child of, God knows whom; the associate of gamblers and thieves; with just enough education to understand the social depths that I have reached; my days spent in idleness, my nights in remorse; with such an existence, I don't think it would be hard to part, at any time."

He eyed her an instant in silence; then he arose

to his feet, and catching her by the arm tightly, stared into her eyes as if he would read what lay beyond their beauty. Although he said: "What do you mean by this bravado?"

"I mean to find out, from *some* source, where this unfortunate wife is, and, having done this, I'll tell her everything about this conspiracy."

The man was startled. In all his experience, he had never been openly defied by her before. He knew she had a will that was hard to defeat, but he now determined to break that imperious will at whatever cost.

"If you do this—if you make even an attempt to do this, I'll strangle you!"

His fingers were working as if eager to bury themselves in her throat, but, Magdalen Norman flinched not, as she doggedly replied:

"I don't care!"

"Don't say that again!" He was breathing heavily now.

"I will!"

"Don't do it, I say!"

"Why don't you kill me?"

"Have a care, or I may."

"I wish you would."

"You do? Then I'll kill you, or I'll take the stubbornness out of you."

He clutched her by the throat, frantic with rage.

"Do you give in?"

She could not speak. Her breath only came faintly; his fingers were sinking deeper and deeper into her soft, round throat, but she had power to shake her head negatively, and she did so.

"Curse you. I'll conquer you," he hissed, and then pressed his fingers tighter.

Her form began to stiffen; her weight fell upon his arm, and, letting go his hold upon her, she sunk in a heap to the floor.

"My God! I've killed her!" he exclaimed, terrified.

"What is to become of me?"

"It don't make much difference what becomes of a brute like you," said a voice close at his side, and, lifting his eyes, he stood face to face with a young man, fashionably, if not neatly, attired, who seemed to sparkle with flashy clothing and cheap jewelry.

"Is that you, Turner?" asked Silas, excitedly.

"I should say it was, and just in time to make a rum old witness for the Commonwealth. Oh, won't you have a good time before Martamat, in the morning?"

Silas dropped on his knees and stared into Mangy's face. There was a flush in it yet, and her heart was still beating.

"She's not dead!" exclaimed Silas, exultantly. "She's not dead!"

"But sleepeth, eh?" put in Turner, lifting her head upon his knee, and smoothing, with a gentle touch, her dark hair back from her forehead.

"What did you do this for, Norman?"

"Well, she wouldn't mind me, and threatened to blow upon a friend of mine."

"Was that all?"

"All—was it not enough?"

"Well, look here, my pious friend," said Turner, determinedly; "it's well for you that gal ain't dead, or skin me if I wouldn't make daylight shine through you." As he spoke he touched significantly the handle of a revolver that peeped out of the breast pocket of his coat, and ground his teeth together as if he would make powder of them.

"Are you crazy, too?" ejaculated Norman. "Can not a father correct his own child?"

"Bosh!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, now, look here, old Missouri; you can't come the parental dodge on me. I'm se-ve-ral years too aged for that."

Silas quailed at the mention of Missouri, and said, very meekly:

"There, Turner, we won't quarrel. Why should you want to interfere with me?"

"I don't. But I love that gal there—that is if I know the meaning of the word—and I am going to stand by her."

"Oh, Brad Turner! Save me! save me!" cried Mangy, opening her eyes and recognizing the face above her.

"Yes, Magdalen; I'll stand by you," replied Turner.

"You'll forgive me, Mangy; I was crazy—I'm so sorry—I'll be better to you. I'll—"

"You won't get a chance," put in Turner. "Magdalen Norman is under my care now, seeing as she asked me to save her, and I'm going to do it."

Silas Norman's face grew livid, and he clenched his fist and advanced threateningly.

"Don't have me to shed blood, Silas," said Turner, putting his hand again on the revolver. "Come, Mangy, I'll get you a better—at least a kinder home than this."

The girl arose and clung to Turner's arm. Notwithstanding her defiant conduct, she was afraid of the man whom she had learned to call father, although she had always entertained great doubts as to this relationship.

"Let's go, Brad! Oh, do let us go."

Turner said: "Silas, when you learn to treat the gal better I'll bring her back."

"Mangy, are you going to leave your father in this way?" pleaded Norman.

She did not reply, only clung closer to Turner, and thus they passed out of the open door into the dark hall, down the creaking stairs, and out into the inclement night.

CHAPTER VI.

FIGHTING THE TIGER.

ST. CHARLES street was glowing with lights; the two theaters were brilliant with gas jets; at the

corner of Commercial Place a curious crowd were surrounding a man with a huge telescope leveled at Mars; the flags of all nations, and many unknown countries, fluttered in front of the museum; here and there poor mendicant Italian children sung out discordant songs, accompanying themselves on harp and violin. Above all could be heard the round, full voice of a man calling out, in stentorian accents, "Keno!" The voice came from the third story of that notorious gambling-hell which, during the reign of licensed gambling, was designated as the "Polka." All the windows were out, for, notwithstanding the season, the night was very warm.

The clock in the Presbyterian church, in Lafayette Square was pointing to eleven, when Mark Blanchard leaped out of a street car, on Carondelet street and hurrying along Perdido, turned down St. Charles street.

As he approached the "Polka," he glanced around as if to see if any of his respectable friends were in sight. Satisfying himself that he was unobserved, he pushed back the swinging green-baize door, and entered.

On either side of the long room tables were ranged, around which were collected knots of men, some betting a picayune on "chuck-a-luck," and others wagering a shining eagle or crisp greenback on "Rondo."

Mark did not stop here; but pushing his way through the throng, he ascended to the second floor, where a bland, oily gentleman named Cypher was dealing faro.

"Cypher, did you see Norman to-night?" whispered Mark.

"No; but he left this note for you."

Mark took the note offered him. It was enveloped in a buff piece of paper. On opening it he found the following, scribbled in an unsteady hand:

"Will meet you at midnight in front of the Jackson Statue, in Jackson Square.

"Faithfully, NORMAN."

"He did not say why he could not meet me here, did he?" asked Mark, after reading.

"No; but I suppose he knows his biz."

"I guess so," Mark replied, and then turning, he walked down the stairs and into the street.

At the Custom-House he took a street car, just starting for the Barracks.

The night was very dark, and the vehicle had reached the French Market before he discovered that he had passed the place of rendezvous.

Leaping from the car he began to walk briskly toward the square, when, all at once, he thought he heard footsteps behind him.

He paused and looked behind him. Nothing was to be seen, however, but the shipping on the one hand, and the low, dingy old market on the other.

On he went again; once more he thought he detected footsteps behind him.

This time he stepped into the dark doorway of a tall house, and waited.

He had just done so, when a dark-hooded woman came creeping along, as if she was searching for somebody.

Mark could not see her face, but he felt sure, judging from her awkward gait and stooped shoulders, that she was an old woman.

If she saw him she gave no sign, but hurried on, turning, at length, into a dark alleyway, a short distance ahead.

"If she is watching me," said Mark, to himself. "I have thrown her off the scent."

In a few moments more he had entered the Square from the levee, and found Silas Norman seated on a rustic seat immediately in front of the great bronze hero of Chalmette.

"Is that you, Blanchard?" asked Silas, peering up through the darkness.

"Yes, of course; but what, in the name of old Jackson, brought you here? Why did you not meet me at the Polka?"

"Well, it's a long story," answered Silas. "I have had a devil of a time with Turner, since, and Mangy has left me, and I'm afraid these two mean mischief."

"I'm afraid you've made a great bungle of this matter," said Mark, curtly. "What's the nature of this trouble? I trust you have had sense enough not to let Turner into our secrets until you had first satisfied yourself of his loyalty?"

"Well, now, Mister Blanchard, you need not attempt the bluff game with such a slim hand," replied Silas, rising. "I don't relish sauce, sir. I would have you remember that, too!"

"I did not give you any sauce," answered Mark, humbly. "I only asked you a simple question in a civil way."

"Well, then, I'll answer you civilly," returned Norman. "They suspect, but they don't know nothing."

"And our plans are sure?" asked Mark, eagerly.

"As fate."

"Good. Have you found a man to take Lillie away?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-night, if you wish."

"Well, then, let's go at once. I feel very uneasy while she is here. I think the sooner she is taken off the better. To tell you the truth, Silas, I'm frightened lest this thing should leak out."

"I guess there's no danger; but come, Pedro may escape us."

"Who is Pedro?"

"The young man I spoke of."

"He is a Spaniard, is he not?" said Mark, as he followed his companion.

"Yes."

"Can he be trusted, do you think?"
"Unto death. You need not fear Pedro Mento."
The worthies left the square by the gate in front of the Cathedral of St. Louis, and, as they did so, a dark figure glided from behind the statue and disappeared in the direction of the market-place.

It was just one o'clock when Silas Norman and Mark Blanchard stopped in front of a low, dingy, one-story dwelling on Spain street. It was one of those structures which must have been erected in the previous century, for the one large front-window had diamond-shaped panes, and the sloping roof of tiles was slimy with clinging moss.

Norman stepped briskly up to the door, and rapped twice; then, after a moment's pause, called out:

"Pedro Mento! I say, Pedro?"

The window swung back, and a frowzy-looking head was pushed into the street.

"Is that you, Silas?"

"Yes," replied Norman.

The head disappeared in a twinkling, and the next instant the door was opened, and the two men entered.

The apartment in which Mark found himself, was scantily furnished, but, whatever articles it did contain, were antique and of Spanish manufacture. A heavy bronze chandelier stood on a black table in the center of the room, and shed a feeble light upon the trio as they seated themselves around the board.

"This, Pedro, is the gentleman who wishes to employ you. He has come here to give you instructions as to your mission," said Norman, by way of introduction.

"I'm glad to meet you, senor," said Pedro, rising and extending his yellow hand familiarly to Mark.

The latter did not take the proffered hand, but simply said: "Pedro, if you do this job nicely, you shall have a thousand dollars. That's worth working for."

"Yes, better than smuggling at the Passes. When do you want me to sail?"

"The gentleman thinks you had better start at once—say to-morrow evening," replied Norman, speaking as if the query had been propounded to him.

"Yes, I think you can start to-morrow. I originally stipulated a fortnight between taking my leave and sending for her, but things have been falling out so, that the sooner we get her out of Louisiana the safer for all concerned," chimed in Mark.

Pedro quite agreed with him.

"And you had better fix yourself up; and, remember, look and act like a Mexican," added Norman.

"Trust Pedro Mento for that," replied the Spaniard. "But, now, for orders: what am I to do?"

"Take this letter," and here Mark took a letter from the breast-pocket of his coat and gave it to Pedro, "and give it to Tillie, whom you will find in the third house east of Algiers, and directly in front of that great Bremen steamship, a little back from the river, in the canefield."

"Yes," Pedro said, and nodded his head.

"You are to tell her that you left me at Galveston, and that I will wait for you at Vera Cruz. This letter will explain the rest."

"And when I reach Vera Cruz, what am I to do then?" asked Pedro.

"You are to secure for her comfortable quarters," replied Mark, "and then inform her that I have been killed in a duel."

"Will she believe me?"

"Of course she will," said Norman. "If she doubts, you can have a tombstone put up in the graveyard of San Jacinto, sacred to the memory of Mark Blanchard."

"A capital idea!" exclaimed Mark; "do that by all means."

All three smiled approvingly, and the plot satisfied the plotters.

"Have you a wife, Pedro?" asked Mark, after a pause.

"No."

"Who keeps house for you?"

"Mamma Guy, an old woman, who mends nets for a living. I'm only a lodger."

"Where is she now?"

"Asleep."

"Sound?"

"As a bug."

"Well, then, Pedro, I expect you to start to-morrow evening; and here is your traveling expenses."

Mark counted out two hundred dollars, which Pedro rolled up into a wad and pocketed with some satisfaction.

"If ever you want to write to me," said Mark, "direct your letters to our friend Silas, here."

"All right," returned Pedro.

The three men then arose, and, after bidding the Spaniard adieu, Norman and Mark stepped into the night, and bent their steps toward Canal street.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUNTERPLOT.

We will now follow the dark figure which we have seen escape from Jackson Square. As it passes in front of the gas lamp there we catch a glimpse of a shriveled face, that might have been abaster in its youth, but certainly more resembles parchment now; it was the face of a woman of sixty—a crafty, cunning face, but not unkind or repulsive by any means.

Despite her years she walked rapidly and soon reached a tall, fine-looking dwelling on Dauphin street. Without stopping to rap, she pushed open the door and ascended to the second floor. Here she tap-

ped softly at a door, from under which a strong ray of light crept into the darkness of the corridor.

The door was instantly unlocked from the inside, and Mangy stood on the threshold.

"Come in, Martha, good soul, come in!" were her first words, as soon as she recognized her visitor.

"Is that Martha?" cried a voice from the inside, which clearly was that of Bradley Turner.

"Yes, my child; it's old Martha," replied the old woman, hobbling into the room.

She looked around at the comfortable crimson carpet; at the soft, luxurious chairs and sofa; at the heavily-framed pictures on the wall, and then over at Bradley, where he sat shuffling a pack of cards at a table.

"Hum, hum, but you're comfortable here, Miss Mangy. Nicer is it sitting here than tramping over this big city in the fog and night air," she remarked, as she dropped into a chair and threw off her big hood.

"Yes," replied Mangy, coming forward, and laying her hand on Martha's shoulder, "we are very comfortable, and I know you are very tired."

"Yes, indeed! and that I am; and all for nothing, or next to nothing."

"You don't mean to say that you've been gallivanting on the scent all night, and have found nothing at the end of the trail—does you?" asked Turner, dropping the cards and looking into Martha's face.

"Well, did you ever!" exclaimed the old woman. "There's my thanks for helping you two to do a noble action. Well, did you ever!"

"Now, just listen to that provoking old woman. Whose noble action is it, I'd like to know? Is it mine? I guess not!" and having said this, in an injured tone, and with a show of indignation, Turner threw himself back on his chair and fell to a contemplation of the ceiling.

"There, there now; don't quarrel over who is responsible for a good Christian act," said Mangy, soothingly. "I'm sure you both have reason to be proud of the aid you have given me in my weak endeavor to save a poor, wronged wife from despair, and perhaps death."

"But he is so snappish," put in Martha. "Bless me if I can live in the same house with him, hardly."

"Never mind, Brad," replied Mangy. "What have you discovered?"

"Well," and as the old woman began, she folded her hands in her lap in a self-satisfied way, "I've found out that Silas Norman is plaugy afraid of you two betraying him. He said as much to the young man when he met him in the Square."

"Well," said Mangy, eagerly, "what then?"

"He told him that he had a man on Spain street to do what he had first cut out for Turner, here, to do."

"Did you hear the name of the individual?" asked Turner.

"Yes, but not very plain. You see I had that big block of stone, on which Jackson's horse stands, between me and them, and I had some trouble in catching their words."

"What was the name?" asked Mangy.

"Well, it sounded—mind, I don't say it is the name, but I say it sounded like Pedro Melto."

"Bully!" broke in Turner. "Now matters are getting interesting. Do you know, Mangy, that this thing of doing a disinterested Christian act is pleasant now and then, by way of variety? It wouldn't do to follow as a regular business, you know."

"And why not?" asked Mangy, her eyes sparkling as she witnessed the enthusiasm of her friend.

"Why not?" ejaculated Turner. "Would you have us starve to death?"

"No, not a bit of it, and I'm almost ashamed to hear you say so, Brad Turner. There is such a thing as working for an honest living, is there not?"

"Working for a living?" repeated Brad, as if stunned by the thought. "You wouldn't; now come, Mangy, you wouldn't have a fellow come down to plain, hard work like a nigger? You can't mean that?"

"Yes, I do, and nothing else, although I can't see that work would make a nigger of you. Work is not ignoble if the laborer is not degraded already."

Bradley Turner gazed at the speaker in open-mouthed wonder, and when she had finished, he said, rather thoughtfully:

"Mangy Norman, you are just as far above me and that rascally old humbug, Norman, as the sun is above the earth, and you're just about that much brighter and better than either of us."

"No, no, Brad; you are mistaken. I have known of the perpetration of robberies and have kept my silence, thereby making myself as guilty as those who actually did the stealing. My father—"

"Your bogus father, you mean," interrupted Brad.

"Well, it don't matter. He's the only father I ever knew, and while I know that he is not my real parent, still he has been kind to me often, and, as I was about to remark, I would like better than all things else to save him from this terrible life he is leading."

"Can't never do it," put in Martha, who had been an attentive listener. "Silas Norman is bad from the bone out, and it's no use for any person talking or trying to tell me any thing else."

"Guess no person will worry themselves trying to convince you," said Turner, with sly sarcasm.

Martha was warming up for a fresh onslaught, but Mangy, seeing this, turned the conversation adroitly by saying:

"What do you propose to do now, Brad, about this Blanchard affair?"

"Do? Why, I'll find out Mister Pedro Melto, of Spain street, to-morrow night, and then I'll dog him

to the home of Mark Blanchard's cast-off toy, and then prepare Mrs. Mark for a grand tableau, minus the red fire."

The plan appeared very good and easy of execution, and Mangy said:

"If you do this, Brad, I'll not forget you; be sure of that."

"I'll do it, Miss Norman," replied Brad; "and now, as the actors say in the play—fare thee well until to-morrow. Good-night, Mammy Martha; good-night."

He shook hands with both, and a moment after he was up in his own chamber near the roof, and Martha and Mangy were still discussing the events of the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

HO! FOR MEXICO!

The evening sun was bathing the beautiful Southern landscape in a golden glory; the sinuous Mississippi rolled silently between its artificial banks toward the Gulf, its waters catching faintly the radiance from the sky.

Tillie Blanchard sat in the west window of Sam Pettis's humble cabin, and watched the sun change from gold to crimson, and finally, like a great round world on fire, drop into the distant lake and disappear.

That sun was like her life, which she felt was going down into gloom and darkness, perhaps never to rise again.

Since her husband's departure she had had time to think. But her thoughts were not ministering angels; they were hideous realities, whispering into her unwilling ear the story of her woe and degradation. The wife of a man who had been too proud or timid to openly acknowledge the relationship; the companion of a criminal, who, even now, was a fugitive from justice; the future was indeed dark and gloomy. Had she not loved Mark Blanchard tenderly, truly, with all the devotion of an ardent woman's nature, she would not so easily have forgiven the crime for which he had to flee. But her love, even with this stain upon her idol, was idolatry still.

It was that love which had silenced her remonstrance against a secret marriage; it was that love which had given her courage to leave her poor old father and mother without a word of warning—without a farewell even—to meet the world, side by side with him she loved.

She thought now, as she sadly gazed at the sunset, of her old deserted home in Tennessee; of her kind, good father; of her fair and fond mother. Would they miss her long? Did they still think of her? Did they believe her pure and good, or base and wicked? She would so like to write them a long letter, assuring them that she was Mark Blanchard's wife; that she would soon go back and see them again; and that Mark and she loved each other very much indeed. But no, she could not, dared not write now. They could not forgive Mark as easily as she had done. Abel Maynard would hang his head in disgrace were he to know that his daughter—his pet, his own Tillie—was the wife of a forger.

Ah! these thoughts, this knowledge, were very bitter to this poor half-crazed creature, and, not knowing well what else to do, she laid her head upon the window-sill and wept hot tears, like a vexed child.

A tap at the door aroused her, and turning, she beheld Sam Pettis—big, burly, rough Sam Pettis—standing in the doorway, biting his nether lip, and looking very much puzzled:

"Well, Sam, what is it?" she asked, wiping her eyes.

"The truth is, Mistress Tillie," he began, "I didn't mean to find you crying—I didn't, indeed."

"Oh, it doesn't make any difference, Sam. I'm only a foolish girl, and I'm not worth minding."

"Well, as to that, Mistress Tillie, I can't agree with you. You're too good and sweet to cry much, and I don't want to be bold, or any thing like that, you know, but if there is anything Sam Pettis can do for you to keep you from crying and to make you happy, you can count on him—that's all."

The rough fellow's face was aglow with the tenderest compassion as he said these words, and Tillie felt as if she could almost worship him. His kindness overcame her, however, and, instead of answering him, she burst into a fresh flood of tears. Sam Pettis looked at her helplessly, and seating himself on a stool just by the door, he put up his hands to his face, and cried too.

This was the position of affairs when Sallie Pettis came in out of the cornfield, a few minutes later—her hands full of fresh-laid eggs—and looking from one to the other, she exclaimed:

"What on 'arth is the matter with you two?"

"Oh, Sallie! I felt so lonesome, and I was crying, and Sam there—poor Sam—he pitied me," said Tillie, looking up through her tears.

"Well, I do say!" exclaimed Sallie; "that's the first time as I ever see'd Sam Pettis cry in his natural life."

And saying this, Sallie sat down, and began to sob too.

"Is this where Samuel Pettis lives?"

The voice was low and insinuating, tinged with a slight foreign accent, and on the weeping trio looking suddenly up, they saw the form of Pedro Mento in the open doorway.

"Yes, sir, I live here," replied Sam, rising, and a trifle embarrassed.

"Does Mrs. Blanchard live here, too?" asked Pedro.

"Yes," answered Tillie, before any other person could speak.

"I have a letter from your husband to you." He held out a delicate white missive, and, with a feverish eagerness, Tillie ran forward and clutched it.

Kissing it passionately, she broke the seal and read it half aloud.

It was very brief, and ran thus:

"Galveston, Oct. —, 18—.

"DEAR WIFE:

"The bearer of this is my best friend, Pedro Mar- chia. You can trust him fully to conduct you to Vera Cruz, where I hope to meet you soon. Lose no time, but start at once.

"Your devoted husband, M. B."

"Yes, I will go at once," she said, as she finished reading. "I would go to the end of the world for his sake. When do we start?" This to Pedro.

"If madame is ready," replied the Spaniard, deferentially, "we will go now."

"Now! Why, she can't go now. She is not ready," exclaimed Sallie. "Why, I do say, the very idea of a person running off in this way!"

Tillie smiled. "I'm quite ready, Sallie. My wardrobe is not so extensive. And you, sir," she said, addressing herself to Pedro; "you promise to take good care of me until we see Mark?"

"I do, madame," was the reply.

There was a half an hour spent in filling a valise with a few articles of Tillie's wearing apparel, and in bidding poor, simple-hearted Sam, and kind, patient Sallie, good-by, and then the two travelers were off on their long journey.

They took the train to Brashear City; thence by steamer to Galveston, and there they were com- pelled to wait for three days for the sailing of a brig bound for Mazatlan.

The weather was very beautiful—the days warm and pleasant, the nights moonlit.

Notwithstanding the delights incident to a sea voyage at such a season, Tillie thought the days very long, and the nights inexpressibly dreary.

For the first two days after leaving port she kept her state-room religiously: but, a little after sunset, on the third day, at the solicitation of Pedro and the captain of the vessel, she ventured on deck.

In the east the moon was soaring, lifting itself up out of the water, which, like a liquid wilderness, stretched everywhere, just ruffled into ripples by a slight breeze, that filled the bellied sails and drove the little craft southward.

"It's a purty night, missus," said Captain Black, leaning over the taffrail and addressing Tillie.

"Yes, sir; a very beautiful night," was the reply.

"Do you like moonlight nights on the sea?" asked the old sailor.

"This is the first time I ever saw the sea by night, and I think I never saw any thing half so lovely."

"And you never saw it at night before, eh? Well, well, but that sounds queer, marm—mighty queer, I can tell you—specially to an old sea-dog like me, as was rocked in the cradle of the deep, as the song says."

There was a pause for a minute or two, and then the captain added: "Born inland, eh?"

"Yes."

"Far from the ocean?"

"On the Cumberland river."

"In Kentucky?"

"No; in Tennessee, close to Clarksville."

"So, so! Way up there? Seems to me it would be hard to get one's breath, away up there among the hills."

She laughed at this odd idea, and Pedro, who had been silently watching the sea all the time, laughed as well.

After that night, the captain took quite a fancy to Tillie's society, and many a tedious hour she escaped in listening to the yarns Captain Black was very fond of spinning.

At last, Mazatlan was reached, and here another vessel was found, which, in due season, carried our travelers to the stone-girt harbor of Vera Cruz.

CHAPTER IX.

"LORD HAVE MERCY ON US."

As the vessel touched the quay, Tillie strained her eyes shoreward to see if she could not somewhere detect the form of her husband on the crowded landing. But no; he was not there, and the people all about her were talking in a fierce, foreign tongue, that made her feel—oh, so keenly—how much of a stranger she was.

"Where is Mark?" she asked, turning to Pedro, as they left the vessel.

"At the 'Hotel La Plata,' madame," was the reply. "That is where he told me to meet him."

They picked their way carefully among the barrels and bales that lined the shore, and soon they found themselves in an open square.

"That is the 'Hotel La Plata' over there," said the Spaniard, pointing to a large stone house, with a colonnade in front, and all its windows protected from the sun by small scolloped awnings.

Tillie followed the direction pointed out, and was pleased to find that the hotel exteriorly gave indications of refinement.

A walk of a few minutes and the hotel was reached. Pedro conducted Tillie into the parlor, and went in quest of the clerk.

He came back presently, and introduced her to the proprietor of the house.

"Madame wishes a good room, with every accom- modation," said Pedro.

"We will try to please the senorita," answered the Boniface, bowing profoundly. Then the two men exchanged a few words in Spanish, and, with another bow, the landlord withdrew.

"Where is Mark?" questioned Tillie, as soon as she and Pedro were alone again. "Why don't he come?"

"He is out of town, madame," was the response, "and will not reach the city until midnight."

Tillie looked searchingly up into the man's face, and his eyes fell and his face colored crimson.

"You are deceiving me, Pedro," she said, decided- ly. "I know you are deceiving me."

"I am not, madame."

"You said but now Mark was here at the hotel; now you claim that he is out of town. Tell me, now, Pedro, the truth."

The Spaniard dropped his eyes and remained silent. This frightened Tillie. She thought she dis- covered a disposition to withhold from her the real whereabouts of her husband, and she was all atremble when she said:

"Oh, Pedro, for Heaven's sake, if not for mine, do not—do not keep me in this terrible suspense. Tell me—tell me, where is my husband?"

The Spaniard looked into the beautiful face opposite, so full of agony and entreaty, and while a shade of counterfeited sadness passed over his face, he answered:

"If Madame Blanchard could only bear a little trouble—"

Tillie was upon her feet in an instant. Her eyes were fixed, with a starry, despairing gaze, upon Pe- dro's dusky face; her hands worked nervously, and her form quivered with excitement.

"What do you mean, Pedro?"

The Spaniard hung his head and was silent still.

"Pedro Mento, do you wish to stand there dumb until I go raving mad? Speak out! Where is Mark Blanchard, my husband?"

"Will madame be patient while I speak?"

"As Job; go on!"

"Then, Señor Blanchard is very ill."

"Sick, Pedro? Do you mean to say that he is sick?"

"Very sick."

"Where?"

"At San Madeline."

"Where is San Madeline?"

"Two miles off."

"Then let us go to him at once," exclaimed Tillie. "I must see him. My eyes are aching for the sight."

"Not now, madame. We can not go now."

"And why not?"

"You are tired and need rest. We will go to- morrow."

She shook off the hand that he laid upon her arm.

"No, I am not tired; and, were my feet blistered and bleeding, I would manage to crawl upon my hands and knees to see my husband. Oh, Pedro, you can not understand the depth of my love for Mark. I can hardly realize it myself."

This strong, unselfish love was a new revelation to Pedro Mento, and he began to feel how difficult it would be to control such a nature. He determined on putting an end to this scene at once; and so he said:

"Madame would not find him at San Madeline if she did go."

"Not at San Madeline?"

"No."

"And why not?"

"Because Señor Blanchard is not there."

Tillie's face assumed an ashen hue, and she felt a heavy weight, as of lead, crushing her heart.

"Between her teeth she managed to ask: "What do you mean?"

"You will take comfort, my dear madame, but I have very bad news for you. The landlord has just told me Señor Blanchard fought a duel on Tuesday last."

"Well, well! Go on!" exclaimed Tillie, clutching at Pedro's arm. "Did he kill the man?"

"No, madame. Poor Señor Mark was killed!"

The young wife let go her hold of the man's arm, and, with a moan, sunk helpless to the floor.

At first, Pedro thought she was dead, so limp and colorless was she; but, when he picked her up and placed her upon a sofa near an open window, the glow came faintly back into her cheeks, and presently she opened her eyes and stared about her.

Then the terrible reality of her position came flashing across her mind, corroding it with its fearful fire, and causing her to cry out:

"Oh! my God! I'm going mad—mad—mad!" Her beautiful brown hair fell in a shower about her shoulders; her eyes blazed as if they would burn their lashes, and Pedro, for the nonce, thought she was really crazed.

He sat opposite to her, on the sofa, his own eyes filled with tears, for the wretch was a capital actor, and in vain did he try to comfort her.

She looked at him sternly, and was about to utter a stinging rebuke, but, noticing his tears, she fell to weeping herself, crying out at intervals.

"Oh, God, have pity, have pity!" When the first outburst had subsided she talked to Pedro calmly of her situation; at least, as calmly as a frantic woman could, and he finally prevailed upon her to go to her chamber and take a few hours of rest.

"In the morning," he said, "we will go out to the cemetery of San Madeline, and see his grave."

She wanted to go then, but the Spaniard said it was too late to think of such a thing, and that in the morning she would be better and more able to walk.

Yes, she agreed with him; she was not able to walk now, and in the morning they would go.

It was a night full of pain and heartache to poor Tillie. Thousands of miles from home, friendless and alone in the first hours of a great bereavement. She tried to sleep, but it was impossible. Her feelings were too bitter to be quieted with anything short of death itself.

As the cathedral bell of San Louis tolled the mid- night hour, she pushed back the drapery that concealed her chamber window and looked out into the night.

The moon was shining brightly, gilding the spires

and domes of the old Aztec city with floods of liquid gold. The soft, doleful music of a choir, pealing forth a requiem for a departed soul, came upon the wing of the night wind to her ear, and the hymn of midnight from a Benedictine Monastery welled up from the sleeping squares below, until her whole being was thrilled with the mystery of the music.

"*Kyrie Eleison*" was the burden of the refrain, and falling upon her knees by the open window, she echoed it in plainest English: "Lord have mercy upon us!"

When the morning came at last it found her asleep, just where she had knelt. Dressing herself, she went down to the drawing-room and encountered Pedro.

He spoke to her kindly, and gave her a purse of five hundred Mexican dollars, which, he said, Mark had left in the landlord's care for her.

Then they canvassed the situation, and Tillie de- cided that she would remain in Vera Cruz, close to Mark's grave, until death would place her by his side. Pedro advised a return to New Orleans at once, but he did not urge it strongly, and soon gave in to her plan, and the matter was considered settled.

Two miles east of Vera Cruz, on a sloping hillside, overlooking the bay, lies the cemetery of San Madeline. It is an antique old Necropolis, and holds tombs bearing date two centuries back. Some of its stones are sound and upright yet, but many have been eaten into by the teeth of a thousand tempests, and some are shattered and covered with clinging vines and velvet moss.

About noon, on the day following her arrival in Vera Cruz, Tillie and Pedro made their way through the silent city of the dead, and finally paused before a new-made grave. There was a plain slab of brown stone at its head, and with streaming eyes and breaking heart, Tillie managed to trace out the in- scriptio

"Sacred to the Memory

OF

MARK BLANCHARD.

Requiescat in Pace."

She fell forward upon the new grave, and wept as she had never wept before.

CHAPTER X.

DID SHE LOVE HIM?

It was a bright, cheery morning, early in Februa- ry. The leaves were coming out fresh and beautiful again, and the grass was strewn with those which had just fallen from the branches.

Blanche Davenant was seated in her chamber, reading carefully a letter she had just received from Major Cecil. It was full of interest to her, as it would have been to any woman similarly circum- stanced. It contained an avowal of love for her, and was written with that delicacy which, to the cultivated gentleman, is so natural and becoming.

He told her frankly that he was fully aware of her engagement to Mark Blanchard; that he had no hope of winning a place in her heart, and that, knowing this, he felt, oh, so lonely, and had quite made up his mind to leave New Orleans forever.

"I will be with you before noon to-day, to say good-by and God bless you."

This was the concluding sentence, and when Blanche had read it through she pressed the missive to her heart and fell to weeping. In those two months in which she had known Graham Cecil, she had learned to prize him very highly. He was so kind, so considerate, so attentive, and so wholly unlike Mark Blanchard, that she was not quite sure she did not more than esteem him. Her affianced husband had not secured her heart. She felt sure of this now, although she had not the courage to tell him so. And, after all, what should she do when Graham Cecil would go away and leave her to her fate?

This was the query that she put to her heart on that bright February morning, and finding how empty was her life—how void of promise her future was—she could do nothing but weep bitter, bitter tears.

She was lying upon a sofa, her face buried in the cushions, and her cheeks all wet and tear-stained, when her father entered the room.

Colonel Davenant was greatly surprised. He had never before seen his child so grief-stricken, and it was with a tender hand he stroked her hair back, and, lifting her head up, kissed her fondly.

"What is the matter, Blanche darling?" he asked.

"What has happened?"

She could not speak at first; her tears were falling now heavier than ever. At length she managed to reply:

"Oh, father, I am afraid I do not love Mark as I should. And—and I really do not know what to do. I'm so unhappy—so wretched."

"Why, my daughter," answered the old man, "I am shocked at this. I was under the impression that this union was acceptable to you. Had I ever had a suspicion even to the contrary, be sure I would not have permitted matters to have gone so far."

Colonel Davenant spoke solemnly, even sadly, and it was evident this revelation of his daughter caused him pain.

"Are you quite sure, Blanche, that this is not a whim; that, in short, you understand your heart?"

"I don't know," was the reply; "maybe it is only a notion. But, whatever it is, whether a whim or a reality, I know it has made me very wretched."

Again she bowed her head and wept. Colonel Davenant did not speak at once; he waited for her grief to spend its force, and then said, very calmly:

"My child, this is a very serious matter, and one that should not be treated lightly. Your happiness,

and that of another is involved, and we should be very careful how we tread on dangerous ground. Remember, you have given your word—the sacred pledge of a lady, to marry this young man. He deeply loves you, and you should be very careful that you do not do him a grave injury."

Blanche looked her father straight in the eyes as he said this, and then replied:

"Yes, you are right. I have acted foolishly, and I will try to do better."

"But, understand this, my child," added the colonel: "I do not advise you to wed this man unless you think you can love him, and be to him a good and confiding wife."

She hung her head and answered in a low voice: "I will try to do my duty."

He took the sweet young face between his hands, and, looking into the depths of her soul lit eyes, said:

"I know you will, my darling."

He kissed her still wet cheek, and, after promising to be home soon, started off to see an old banker friend on Carondelet street.

An hour later Blanche met Graham Cecil in the drawing-room. She was very calm and reserved, for she had nerved herself for this scene.

After talking a few moments about commonplace matters, Blanche ventured to remark:

"And so, major, you are going away?"

"Yes, Blanche; I am going away—forever!"

She bit her lips; her eyes fell; that word *forever* ran through her brain with a pitiful sound. Neither spoke for an instant. The silence was becoming embarrassing, when Graham said:

"Blanche, you understand why I am going away. You know the secret that I have so carefully concealed from every eye, and you also know how hopeless that passion is. I have only come to say good-bye. To say any thing else now would be worse than vain. I can only regret that, before I had opportunity to convince you of my affection, you were already the promised wife of another. Such mistakes occur in life quite often, I suppose, and I will have to bear my disappointment as others have borne theirs. It will do you no harm, I hope, to know that, whatever may come to me in the future, no other person will ever have the place in my heart, now held by you."

She never uttered a word—not even when he had finished. Her heart was too full of love and pity for that man, whose voice trembled as he spoke, to admit of language just then. Her head, with all its wealth of beautiful hair, dropped down low, and lower, and, at last, the tears flooded her eyes, dimming their luster.

He looked down upon the bowed form, not knowing how to interpret her silence, until he caught sight of her tears, dropping like purest pearls upon the carpet.

"Blanche, your sorrow at my departure is more than I had a right to expect, and I thank you for it." He reached out his hand, and she took it without looking up. "Good-bye, my little friend; God bless you!"

He was turning away. He dare not stay longer; his voice was growing husky; his wild, earnest passion was struggling for speech; he was forgetting that Blanche Davenant was the espoused of another.

"Graham!" It was Blanche who spoke, and, in an instant, he was by her side.

She was now looking up calmly into his face. Remembering what she was to Mark Blanchard, her womanly sense of duty and dignity came back to her, and she felt strong again in the knowledge that she had a path marked out for her feet which duty and honor compelled her to tread.

"Graham Cecil, you have witnessed my weakness," she began; "you know now that you are very dear to me. But here it must all end. We can never hope to be any thing to each other more than we are."

"You do not love Mark Blanchard then?" asked Major Cecil, eagerly, his face lighting up with hope. "I do not know. I respect Mark Blanchard, and myself, enough to keep my vow, I trust. Had I never seen you, I possibly would have loved him more. I shall try to do what is right. No one can ask more of me."

"Your decision does you credit, Blanche. I would almost as soon lose you as have you prove false to a plighted troth. Now, however, I can ask—if any thing ever comes between your vow and its fulfillment, that you will let me know. Do you promise this?"

"I do," was the reply.

He raised the hand he held in his to his lips and kissed it.

"And now, Blanche Davenant—only woman that I ever loved—you are lost to me. Farewell, darling—farewell!"

He was gone! The bright sunlight lay in a golden patch on the velvet carpet where he stood but an instant since, and Blanche's eyes were riveted to the spot as if she hoped, by her aching gaze, to conjure him back again. The silence was very deep. The clock on the elaborately-carved mantle-piece was ticking so loudly that it seemed to be growing stronger each second. Save this, and the beating of that poor girl's heart, there was nothing to fall upon the ear in all that splendid apartment.

With all its luxurious appointments, with all its rare embellishments, it now appeared vacant and void to her. That man who had just gone out for this, she fell forward upon her face. Her hair, unham Cecil's footprints were, and her lips murmured: "Gone forever—never, never to come back again to me!"

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE STREETS!

It was a dark night. The rain fell in a thin mist; the streets were glistening under the gas-lights, and the gutters of New Orleans were filled with water to the very curbs. The swamp which stretched between the city and the lake was overflowed, and refused to take what the city gutters offered, while a stiff eastern breeze drove Pontchartrain's waters over the banks in all directions. It was a very cheerless night, and so thought Bradley Turner, as he stepped briskly along Perdido and turned into Dryades street. His course lay toward Canal street, through those dens of infamy where women abound, but where virtue and innocence, alas! have no habitation.

Just as he passed the corner of Union, an old man came out of a house to the right, and fell forward upon the pavement. His head struck the bricks with such force that Turner thought his skull had been broken.

"Dead drunk, poor wretch!" was Brad's exclamation, as he stooped down and lifted up the old man's head.

"No, not drunk—only crazy," answered the stranger; "only crazy."

The fall had injured him seriously; the blood was flowing in a warm, scarlet current from a wound behind his left ear, and one side of his head was much bruised.

He was not drunk; Bradley saw that now, and, touched with compassion, he asked:

"What made you fall?"

"I am exhausted," was the reply. "I could not keep my feet longer. Oh, sir, I wish I was dead—I wish that fall had killed me outright."

"And I am precious glad it didn't," replied Turner. "Now, give me your hand. Tha's it. Now you are on your feet again."

The stranger was upon his feet, but his whole frame was quivering, and his eyes were burning, as if the fire of madness had taken possession of the sockets.

He seemed scarcely to understand his position at first, but gradually his wandering senses returned, and he said, grasping Turner's hand:

"God bless you, my friend; you have done me a valuable service, and I wish I was able to repay you in something better than words."

"Seeing as I don't expect any pay," replied Turner, "you needn't give yourself much trouble on that score. What brought you into that house? Seems to me, if you'll pardon the boldness, that that ain't just the kind of a place for a respectable man to be found at this hour of the night."

"Misfortune brought me here, sir," was the answer; "but, it's a long story."

"If it is," put in Turner, "you had better not stop here to tell it. Where do you live?"

"Where do I live?"

"Yes, in what part of the city?"

"I have no home here. I live in Tennessee, but I have been here for five days, wandering the streets in search of a lost child, without eating, without sleeping, and, worse than all, without success."

Bradley Turner, with all his rough experience, was touched at this. The hopeless dejection of the old man, his faltering voice, so full of exquisite sadness, had awakened a tender chord in his own heart, and when the stranger reached out his hand and said, "Good-bye," Turner promptly exclaimed:

"No, old man, you must come with me. Brad Turner is not rich, but he can give you a home for a while, and, maybe, he can help you to find your child."

The two men clasped each others' hand and looked into each others' faces.

This was a new *role* to poor, wayward, and sometimes, wicked Brad Turner, this turning philanthropist; and so he felt awkward, and a trifle shy, too, as he took the stranger's arm and led him away.

The two men bent their steps toward the house on Dauphin street, where we parted with Mangy and the old crone, on the night prior to Tillie's departure for Mexico.

Mangy was sitting in her little sitting-room, trying to read a French fiction. The rose-leaves in the carpet were glowing brightly, and the woolen vine-leaves were trailing their emerald beauty everywhere.

She had changed very much in those two months since we last saw her. Her whole demeanor was more subdued, and she no longer answered to the hideous abbreviation of her given name, to which Silas had accustomed her. Even Brad Turner had mastered his passion for short names, and managed to call her Magdalean Norman, with an ease that astonished himself.

The story she was reading told of a girl who had fallen among evil companions, and had been almost lost, but, through a heroic determination to lead a pure life, had saved herself from ruin, and finally married an honorable man, and lived all her future days in a quiet cottage, surrounded by the barriers of an honest devotion.

"I'll be such a girl!" exclaimed Magdalean, closing the book. "I will place a wide gap between my past and my future life. Thank God, I have not sinned too deeply for repentance."

Just as she uttered these words, the door of the room was pushed open and Bradley Turner entered. He took off his hat, and said respectfully:

"Miss Magdalean, there is a poor old man downstairs, whom I picked up in the streets, and I'd like to bring him up-stairs to my room. He is quiet and won't make any fuss, I think."

"Bradley, this is your house, and not mine, so you can, of course, bring those you like here. But, I hope this *protege* of yours is a respectable person—

one that neither of us should be ashamed to recognize as a friend."

Bradley Turner looked down into the upturned face of the girl, and, after a pause, said, "Magdalean, don't you know I've gotten a heap of respect for you? Don't you know I have treated you just like a sister since you left that old bogus father who was leading you to the bad? There, you needn't color up. I know you never were bad; but, then, you don't suppose you could have lived long with Silas Norman without getting soiled some, do you?"

"No, I am very much afraid my surroundings were none of the best; but, as you say, I have come out of the fire unscathed, and in all my future life I mean to remain so. But, who is this man, Bradley?"

"Well, to tell you candidly, Magdalean, I found him in Dryades street."

"In Dryades street?"

"Now, don't go starting in that way. The poor old fellow was not guilty of wrong. He is in search of a lost daughter, who, he fears, has gone to wreck in this big city."

Magdalean started, as if shocked by an electric flash. "Where is he from?" she asked.

"Tennessee," he said.

"Bradley! I have an idea!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! Mark Blanchard took his wife from Tennessee. Don't you remember?"

"I think I do," was the slow response.

"Perhaps this man's daughter and the girl, Tillie Maynard, are one and the same person? Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," replied Bradley, stroking his chin meditatively; "but, seems to me you jump at conclusions suddenly like."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I simply mean that many a man might have a daughter in Tennessee as well as my new friend, and many a man's daughter might wander down the Mississippi to New Orleans as well as my friend Blanchard's wife. Don't you think so now?"

Yes, she thought so, but the cool, doubtful manner of Bradley was very annoying to a young, impetuous girl, who had just satisfied herself that she had made an interesting discovery.

Seeing this, Turner said: "Now perhaps you are right, after all; and if you are, I'll bag my head, that's all."

Saying this, he started off and soon returned, leading in the old man.

Magdalean placed a large chair for him, close to the center-table, and dropped into a seat immediately opposite.

"You are hurt," she exclaimed, in alarm, noticing the blood upon his clothing.

"Yes, miss, but not bad," replied the old gentleman. "My heart is much sorer than my head."

"But you must have your head dressed. Here, Bradley do you get that towel on the rack there, and, while I hold the basin, you can bathe the wound."

"But I don't want to trouble you, miss," said the old man. "I'm not worth minding. Indeed, I'm not!"

Magdalean paid no heed to his remonstrance, but busied herself about the apartment, and ordered Bradley, until the stranger's head was neatly bandaged and his clothing carefully brushed. When all this had been accomplished, she sat down again, and, while her face beamed with expectation, she said:

"I'm going to ask you a very important question, and I am just dying to hear your answer."

The old man stared into the pretty face, and said: "Well, go on; I'll answer you any thing."

"What is your name?"

She was leaning over the table now, eagerly awaiting his reply.

"Robert Maynard," was the reply.

"And your daughter's name was—"

"Matilda. Although we always called her Tillie."

Magdalean leaped to her feet and caught Bradley Turner by the collar of his coat.

"What did I tell you, eh? What a silly, shallow set you men are, after all! Now, Brad Turner, what have you to say for yourself?"

Poor Bradley looked very guilty, indeed, and answered, with a crestfallen air, really pitiable:

"Well, you see, Magdalean, I was never much on prophecy. But, I can tell you one thing, I am as glad that that old man has turned up as if I had just been handed the largest prize in Charley Howard's lottery. I am, upon my soul!"

"I know you are, you great big, good-hearted fellow! But then, you know you ought to have more faith in women than you have."

This was said in a bantering, laughing way; and then she turned to Robert Maynard, who was regarding both her and Turner with a look of surprise.

"Now, don't you get excited," she began, "but I think I know where your daughter is!"

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed, the tears welling up into his eyes; "at last! at last!"

"There, old man, now keep cool, will you?" said Turner. "No person can tell you any thing as long as you carry on in this style."

"But, I am nearly wild, sir; you can't understand my feelings, sir—indeed, indeed, you can't, sir. My poor wife is waiting my return, nearly as crazy as I am."

"Well, then, your daughter has been in New Orleans," said Magdalean, wiping the moisture from her eyes, "and she is now in Mexico."

"In Mexico!" he ejaculated; "in Mexico! My poor child in Mexico! Oh, surely you are teasing me, miss. You really don't mean that my poor Tillie is so far away?"

"Yes, she is," replied Magdalean; "at least that's where they took her, months ago."

"Who took her?" His eyes were wide open now, and there was a fierce, hard look in them. "Who took my child away? Who dared to take her?"

"Is it possible that you have not suspicioned some person of taking her away?" questioned Turner. "You don't think the girl would leave her home and come way down here if there was not a man in the case?"

"A man. Do you mean to say that she was kidnapped—that she was forced away from her home?"

"No," replied Turner, "she wasn't, but she was coaxed away."

"Coaxed away?" repeated Maynard. Then he closed his eyes an instant and appeared lost in thought; and, finally, starting violently, exclaimed: "Do you mean a young man named Mark Blanchard, who visited our village a few months since?"

"I guess you are on the right track at last, my friend," replied Turner.

"And he it was who ruined her?"

"Yes, and no."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," returned Turner, "that he ruined her by marrying her, but that she is not lost, as you suppose her, but simply a deceived wife."

The old man grasped Bradley by the hand, and, while his voice grew husky, and the tears streamed down his wrinkled face, said:

"Thank God, she is not a thing of shame. I can bear any thing now—any thing but that. Oh, God, that's what was killing me and her poor, poor mother!"

He covered his face with his hands and wept; and so did Turner and Magdalean, too.

When he recovered from his first great joy, they told him everything the reader already knows, of Mark Blanchard's plot to rid himself of his lawful wife, and to form an alliance with the rich Blanche Davenant.

As he listened, his eyes dilated with wonder, and his hands worked nervously as the story was finished. He would like to go at once and throttle the knave; he would like to expose him, and visit upon him the full weight of a father's vengeance before the coming sunrise; but, Magdalean stopped him, by saying:

"You must have more care, or you will ruin all our plans. Suppose you go to-night and publicly denounce this villain, what will your laudable efforts amount to? Simply nothing! He will have you arrested for a lunatic; you will have no evidence to prove either your sanity or your charges, and a mad-house will not afford you a very excellent opportunity of finding your child."

He admitted the force of her reasoning, and she went on to say, that she would furnish him with the necessary funds to go to Mexico in search of his daughter, and that, in the mean time, she would have a close watch kept upon Mark Blanchard's movements, and prevent him, if possible, from committing bigamy."

"And if I find her, what then?"

"Then," answered Magdalean, a gleam of triumph in her beauteous face, "we will unmask this wretch, and show Miss Blanche Davenant the kind of clay of which her idol is made."

After talking the matter over and over, it was settled that Robert Maynard should start on his long journey early on the following day.

CHAPTER XII.

IN A DISTANT LAND.

THREE months have elapsed since the occurrence of the incidents recorded in our previous chapter. A warm May day is drawing to a close. During the early morning hours the rain fell in great cool drops upon the parched roofs and in the dusty streets of Vera Cruz, but, about noon, the clouds rolled away to the eastward, and the sun blazed out again, turning the whitish mud of the narrow streets into dust, and causing the pedestrians to seek the shady sides of the streets to avoid its fierce beams.

Now, however, the heat is less oppressive, and the shadows of the houses are growing long and reaching far. At one end of a long Plaza stands an old man, dressed in the garb of a citizen of the United States. He is weary and travel-stained, and his long white hair falls upon his neck, and struggles in tangled skeins over his shoulders. As we look at him closely we notice there is something familiar about his face, and now, when he lifts up his palm-leaf hat and shades his eyes as he gazes toward the setting sun, we catch a better view of his sun-browned features, and recognize, at once, Robert Maynard.

He has searched all over Tampico; has haunted the most sacred precincts of the capital of Mexico; has walked miles upon miles by day and by night, until now he is full of disappointment and despair. His funds are low. He can not follow the almost indistinct trail much further. He is growing anxious about his home and the poor, half-crazed wife, who, away off by the green shore of the Cumberland, awaits, in pain and tears, his coming.

"I can't go further," he exclaimed. "My heart and feet both fail me, and, but for my poor, loving Sybil, I could lay down in this strange land and dream the dream of death and forgetfulness. Oh! If I could but forget—if I could refuse to think, even for an hour—what a relief it would be; what joy it would give me!"

The tears were creeping into the corners of his deep-blue eyes; but, dashing them away, he looked upward and repeated: "My trust is in Thee, oh, my God; you will not forsake a miserable wretch like me in my sorest need!"

Having said this, he bent his steps toward a church, which stood upon an elevation close by, intending to go in and join the worshipers.

As he took the path leading up to the house of

prayer, his eye caught sight of a girlish form but a short distance ahead. He had surely seen that form before! His heart almost stopped beating. It looked wonderfully like the form of his lost darling! The face was concealed by the thick folds of a dark vail, and he could do nothing but follow her patiently and await the moment when she would throw aside the meshes of her vail and reveal the hidden face.

She passed the church, and followed the long, white, dusty road which led to the cemetery of San Madeline.

He never lost sight of her, however, and when she entered the silent city, where only the dead dwell, he was close behind.

She seemed to be familiar with the place, for she picked her way among the graves with a directness that showed she had some special object in her visit. Presently, she stopped before a grave, almost hid in flowers, and falling upon her knees, she burst into tears, exclaiming between her sobs:

"Oh, my poor, dead husband, why don't you speak to me—why don't you speak to me, I'm so lonely?"

He recognized the voice at once; it was music to his eager ears, and, unable to repress his speech longer, he opened his arms wide, and cried, in a faltering voice:

"Tillie Maynard, my child! my darling! have I found you at last?"

She threw back her vail and looked up; then screaming and fainting, she tottered forward, and fell into the outstretched arms.

"Oh, Tillie, my child! my child! is this really you?" he cried, smoothing back her hair from her pure brow, and kissing her flushed cheek again and again.

She did not answer; she could not speak; her new joy was too great; but she crept closer to his warm breast and nestled her head there, where it had often lain before in the old days, which now appeared so very, very far away indeed.

After a few moments she managed to ask where he had come from, and what had brought him to Vera Cruz.

"I came after you, my child. All these months, since you left us, I have searched for you. I have walked the streets of Nashville, of Louisville, of St. Louis, by night and by day, until, at last, despairing, I reached New Orleans. There I learned of your whereabouts and of the great misfortune that had overtaken you."

"You heard, then, of Mark's death?"

"Of his death?" replied the old man, bitterly. "No, I wish to Heaven I had! Oh, Tillie, Tillie, how could you leave your poor father and mother, who thought the world of you, for such a wretch as Blanchard?"

Tillie Maynard slipped out of his arms, and, while her face took on an ashen hue, she said, very solemnly:

"Father, I know I have done very wrong, and that he was too proud to ask your consent, but he was my husband, and that, if not this grave, should protect his memory from insult."

She looked strangely beautiful as she stood there, in the glare of the yellow sunset, her hair rippling over her shoulders with the sunbeams glinting through the meshes, and her face wearing a majestic loveliness impossible to paint.

The old man hesitated to speak. He knew now how deep his revelation must sink into a tender womanly heart; he realized how ardent was the love a villain had awoke in the impressionable heart of his child, and he knew how bitter the words he was forced to utter would sound on her ears.

"Tillie," he began, in a kindly, compassionate way, "that grave is hollow; your husband is living."

"My husband living," she repeated. "You are surely crazed, father. You are not rational, or else you have been cruelly deceived."

"Not at all, my poor child," he said. "'Tis you who have been deceived, basely deceived, for, at this very moment Mark Blanchard is in New Orleans, preparing for his marriage with a young lady named Davenant."

If her face had been ashen before, now it assumed a deathly pallor; her eyes stared with a parched gaze into the speaker's face; she placed her hands over her ears to shut out this monstrous story, and, without knowing exactly what she said, she asked in a hoarse whisper:

"Who told you this?"

He told her the whole story then, word by word, as he had heard it from Magdalean's lips, and she listened patiently, silently, all the while growing numb with a pain she had never felt before. When he had finished, she gazed down upon the flower-strewn mound an instant, and then exclaimed: "Oh, Father in Heaven! I wish he was buried there, and I with him. But this—this desertion, this being cast off, this is, oh! so horrible! I feel it is breaking my poor heart at last."

With a wail that sounded dismal in that old churchyard, and which rung out along the hill-tops like unearthly music, she fell forward upon her face.

Robert Maynard stooped down and picked her up hastily; but when she spoke again it was incoherently; the poor young wife was a raving maniac.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MEETING.

WHEN Robert Maynard discovered the condition of his daughter he was overwhelmed with a nameless grief—a grief so deep, so terrible, as to almost unseat his own reason. But, he had now a mission to perform which must take precedence over every other consideration; he must take a tender care of poor Tillie, and he must also have vengeance on the head of her betrayer.

It was late—long after dark—when father and

daughter wandered into the great hotel of San Salvador in Vera Cruz. He had only a few dollars, but this was ample to procure a bed and breakfast for the twain; after that, Providence would have to be relied upon.

Robert Maynard led his daughter into the large parlor of the hotel. Seating her there he whispered: "Sit there, Tillie, dearest, until I go and find the landlord. Don't move now."

There was little need to add this admonition, for she heard him not; but sat gazing at the flowers in the carpet with a sad and wistful gaze.

A young man sat on the opposite side of the apartment reading a book of travels, but he paid no attention to either Tillie or her father until the former said, slowly and solemnly:

"These are the roses I planted on Mark Blanchard's grave—poor Mark!"

As the name dropped from her lips the young man started, and turned his eyes upon Tillie.

With the light streaming full upon his handsome face we recognize in him an old acquaintance—Major Cecil.

He was a trifle paler, and a little more sedate than when we last saw him, and his general appearance gave token that he yet was suffering keenly from his great disappointment.

"My young lady, are you a friend of Mark Blanchard?" he asked, deferentially.

She looked up quickly, and after scanning Cecil's face, she replied:

"Oh, yes; he was mine—he was my own Mark. But that was before he died," she added, her lips twitching with agony, and her eyes dimming with tears.

Major Cecil thought he discovered something strange about her manner, but her words had awakened a curiosity within him, and he could not help asking her, even at the risk of being deemed impertinent, where she had met Mr. Blanchard, and what led her to suppose that he was dead?

"I don't know," she said, in response. "I think I met him years ago—oh, so many years ago—and then he went and died and made me so miserable." She was crying again—crying in a doleful way—and rocking to and fro hopelessly and despairing.

Cecil knew now that her reason was gone; that he was conversing with a maniac, and so he spoke no more until her father returned, when he said:

"Your daughter is suffering, I see, from an affection of the brain."

"Yes," was the answer, "but I hope, with a little rest and quiet, she will be restored."

"May I ask if her condition is the result of a shock, or has this gradually grown upon her?"

"She has just heard a piece of bad news, and it has upset her reason for the time being."

"Indeed! I am very sorry," returned Cecil, "and if I can be of any service to you I hope you will command me. You are from the United States, I perceive, and as I hail from there myself, you should have no hesitancy in accepting assistance from a countryman."

This liberal offer took Maynard by surprise, and, before speaking, he grasped Major Cecil's hand and wrung it tightly. "God bless you, sir!" he managed to stammer out at last. "I feel that you are a gentleman, and I accept your offer. To be candid with you, sir, I am very much in need of assistance."

The old man's face was crimson as he made this confession, and the eye of Cecil was quick to notice how sensitive he was, and so he adroitly turned the conversation, by saying:

"Your daughter in her delirium made mention of an old acquaintance of mine, named Mark Blanchard, of New Orleans. Did you know him, too?"

Maynard started, and asked, hurriedly: "Are you a friend of Mark Blanchard?"

"No, not exactly a friend; only an acquaintance, I said."

"You know him, then?"

"Very well. Do you?"

"I never met him but once or twice in my life, and that was while he was on a visit to Dover, Tennessee; but, I know him to be a base, black-hearted scoundrel."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Cecil. "Pray, did he ever injure you?"

"Injure me? Great God! he has robbed my poor child of her reason; he has left her, while yet a child, a broken-hearted idiot; has made my life, and my poor Sybil's life, little better than a blackened, hopeless existence."

"You astonish me by these words," answered Major Cecil. "What, pray, has been the nature of the injury?"

"Do you see that girl there? She is my only child."

"Well?"

"Dearer to me than my own life; raised as tenderly as I knew how. Why, sir, I've watched her from a child, growing up day by day, and knew that each succeeding hour she was becoming more and more important to my happiness. Oh, sir! you don't know what it is to watch, lovingly and fondly, a child grow up into beauty and womanhood, only to see her perish at last!"

"I think I can appreciate the feeling of a father under such circumstances," replied Cecil; "but let me ask you one thing. What has Mark Blanchard to do with all this?"

"What has Mark Blanchard to do with it?"

"Yes. What has he done?"

"Well, sir, he has done everything. He coaxed my child to run away with him, and, finding she was proof against his blandishments, he married her in secret, and, finding he could make a more advantageous match, he cruelly, heartlessly deserted her."

"Are you sure of this—that he married her—quite sure?"

"Yes; sure."

"Tell me all you know about this affair, please, and in as few words as possible. I am very well acquainted with this young lady Blanchard proposes to marry, and if what you tell me proves true, there is no time to lose. I must hasten to New Orleans and save Blanche Davenant from a horrible fate."

Robert Maynard related the whole story again, from beginning to end, and when he had finished, Cecil said, excitedly:

"My good friend, we have no time to lose. That young lady is very dear to me, and it is of the utmost importance that I reach her side as soon as possible. When will you be ready to start?"

"Almost at once."

"Good! Will your daughter be able to start to-morrow?"

"Yes. Poor girl! it matters little to her when or where we go now."

"Then we will leave to-morrow."

"Is there a steamer leaving so soon?"

"The 'Brazos' leaves for Galveston at seven o'clock to-morrow evening. I have a state-room already engaged, and in the morning I will see to it that you and your daughter are comfortably provided for."

The two men clasped hands, and looked kindly into each other's eyes, while Tillie rocked, dimly, backward and forward, and moaned: "Dead! dead! dead!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A WEDDING-PARTY.

IT was a beautiful evening. The sun had set, round and red, throwing its last slanting beams over the waters of Lake Pontchartrain, as the full-faced moon sailed grandly up from the east and looked down on the circling city of New Orleans. The tall, dark magnolias held in their arms large trumpet-shaped flowers, so full of perfume that the luxuriant plants, which everywhere abound in the Crescent City, seemed to be heavy with the rich odor, while the river wound like a belt of shimmering silver between artificial banks of darkest emerald.

In front of Colonel Davenant's house on St. Charles street a long line of glittering equipages were drawn, and from the lower to the highest story lights blazed with a brilliancy that lit up the surrounding grounds.

From the cluster of orange trees, now white with dainty blossoms, parti-colored lanterns depended, and through the avenues beneath the trees flitted gay ladies and handsome gentlemen, interchanging the amenities of social life, or bowing down before the shrine of the boy-god Cupid.

Passing through the elegant parlors, where plate-glass windows, heavy brocade curtains, and soft velvet carpets gave an air of comfort and luxury, we encounter knots of ladies and gentlemen, all discussing in an animated manner the great event of the evening—the marriage of Mark Blanchard to Miss Blanche Davenant.

In an upper room the bride elect sits, robed for the ceremony. She never looked more graceful, nor lovelier, than on this occasion. Her dress of sheeny white satin fitted her lithe, girlish figure to perfection, and from beneath its ample folds a tiny slippers foot peeped out, that might have awakened the envy of a Cinderella. The sweet, childlike beauty of her face, however, was somewhat clouded by a shadow of unspeakable sadness, and it was only with the greatest effort that she restrained her tears.

The fatal hour, when she must forever bury her love for Graham Cecil, had now arrived, and she felt how empty her future must be without it. It is a hard thing for a man to put away finally the passion of his life, but it is doubly terrible for a woman to do so. With a man, love is but an event at best; but, with a woman—a true woman—it is a part—a precious part—of life itself.

"Well, my daughter," said Colonel Davenant, entering the room, "you have sent for me, I presume, to say good-by?"

She looked up quickly, and then, as her eyes filled with tears, she rushed into his great, broad, manly breast.

"Oh, papa, I cannot leave you—I cannot leave you," she murmured.

He would not trust himself to speak at once, and so he contented himself with simply stroking her hair with a gentle, sympathetic touch which had grown very familiar to her in that past which she was about to quit forever.

"You do not relish this union, I fear, my child," said Colonel Davenant, at last; "but, I am inclined to think it is only a passing whim, which Mark's assiduous care and love will dispel completely."

"I hope so."

"But, don't you do more than hope? Do you not think so?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know! That's a very strange reply."

"I can't help it, then. Strange as it is, I do not know whether I hate Mark Blanchard or not."

"My daughter!" the old gentleman started as this exclamation dropped from his lips, and he held Blanche out from him at arm's length, "if I thought you were serious about this, if I thought it was even possible for you to hate any person who has been so uniformly kind to you as Mark Blanchard has been, late as is the hour, I would not permit this ceremony to proceed. I am both surprised and shocked."

There was a flutter of silks and crisp laces in the hall, and the next moment the two young ladies who were to act as bridesmaids fluttered into the apartment.

Father and daughter recovered at once from their agitation, and smilingly welcomed the new-comers.

"Miss Blanche, the minister is down-stairs," said

Miss Adele Bartmore, the tallest as well as the prettiest of the girls, while her companion, the proud Miss McTivesy, folded her hands demurely over her breast and awaited in silence the pleasure of the bride elect.

"Miss Blanche, de young gen'l'man is down-stairs, and I's sent up to see as if you is ready yet." These were Betsy, the colored servant girl's words, and the head of the speaker was thrust in at the half-open door as she uttered them.

"Tell him that I am ready, Betsy," replied Blanche, and then she turned to her father and said: "I am doing my duty, papa, as I understand it, and I leave the rest with God."

She put up her arms around the neck of her father, and clung close, very close, to him, as she heard the sound of Mark Blanchard's steps upon the stairs.

"Good-by, papa," she whispered.

He drew her to him tenderly, and kissing her repeatedly, exclaimed: "Good-by, my little pet, and God in his mercy bless and protect you."

Adele Bartmore felt very much like weeping. She was much given to tears, but the stiff stolidity of her companion, Miss McTivesy, restrained her, and so there were many smiles instead of weeping when Mark Blanchard stepped lightly into the room.

He was dressed in a suit of black, lusterless but stylish, and looked every inch a man. His face was wreathed in smiles, and in his gloved hand he held a rich bouquet of natural flowers.

These he handed, with a graceful bow, to Blanche, saying in an undertone, "This is as it should be, 'sweets to the sweet.'" Then, turning to Colonel Davenant, he said: "I hope to make amends for my past idle, pleasure-seeking life, by a lifetime of constant devotion to the best interests of your daughter. And if she is only as happy in the future as I shall try to make her, neither you nor she shall have any cause to regret this evening's ceremony."

The two men shook hands cordially; just then the musicians in the parlor struck up "The Wedding March," and, the next moment, the whole party were descending to the brilliant drawing-room, where the minister and assembled guests awaited them.

It was a brilliant scene. The long, splendid rooms filled with the gayety and fashion of the greatest city of the South; the sweet voice of mellow music floating everywhere, and the calm, unimpassioned minister, book in hand, standing in the center of the room ready to pronounce the words that bind together two persons for good or evil.

The bridal party slowly approached the center of the apartment. Blanche was leaning upon the arm of her father, while the eager eyes of old Gabriel Blanchard followed her from the remotest corner. This is what he had struggled for so long, and now his plans were about to be consummated; his nephew and heir would, in a few moments, be the husband of the only child of his most intimate friend. He arose, and leaning on his staff, tottered forward until he had almost touched the elbow of his protege.

Then there was a calm—a calm so deep that the breathing of the audience could be distinctly heard.

The minister lifted his eyes from the floor, and surveyed the company with one sweeping glance. Then he said, in a deep voice:

"If anybody knows aught why this man and this woman should not be joined in holy wedlock, let them speak now—"

Before he could finish the sentence, the weird form of old Martha appeared in the doorway, and, shambling directly to the minister's side, and looking Mark Blanchard sternly in the face, she lifted her long, bony finger with an authoritative gesture, and said:

"This man is the lawful husband of a living wife!"

The book fell from the hands of the wonder-struck preacher; Blanche started back, and fell fainting into the arms of her father, while Mark Blanchard gazed at old Martha as if she had been an apparition conjured up by some foul spirit, from the gloomiest depths of Hades, to bear witness against him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST.

It was a terrible moment for him; it was the crisis in his checkered career, and he felt it was necessary to meet it courageously, as befitted a brave, crime-stained man.

Turning upon Martha, he said:

"Who are you that dare to invade the privacy of this house for the purpose of creating a dramatic scene, which, but for the effect it has had upon Miss Davenant here, might be turned into a ridiculous farce?"

"Who am I?" retorted Martha. "I am simply an old woman who don't like to see young men have two wives, even if one is as far away as Mexico."

Mark's eyes flashed around upon the astonished company. He perceived at once that the old woman's speech was having a serious effect; and then, for the first time, he saw his way out of this disagreeable dilemma.

Drawing himself up with a self-satisfied air, he said, carelessly, and smiling all the while:

"She's crazy. That's all. Here, old woman, run off; that's a good soul. Go."

Those who had gathered around the principal actors in this drama now began to shrink away from Martha, and a few of the very young ladies indulged in screams, and ran, hiding themselves finally behind their parents or lovers.

Martha was astonished. This brazen piece of acting on the part of Mark Blanchard was a new phase in the proceedings for which she had not come prepared, and so she said:

"You play your cards well, youngster—very well,

indeed; but I will go and bring my proof, sir. Yes, sir, I have proof enough to hang you!"

Blanche had, by this time, sufficiently recovered to grasp the arm of the old woman as the latter turned to go. It was a vice-like grip, and Martha, turning around, said:

"Good lady, don't detain me; I am going after the proof."

"You must not go until you convince me that you have spoken the truth. Has Mark Blanchard another wife living?" These were Blanche's words, and the appeal that was in them touched even the heart of old Martha Sillingsby.

"Before God I have told you all the truth," was Martha's reply, and before a hand was outstretched to detain her, she was gone.

The Rev. Jasper Osborn, who had been called upon to perform a marriage ceremony, was greatly shocked at all this, and, recovering his speech only after the old woman had disappeared, he said, in a quiet, womanish voice:

"My dear friends, let not the freaks of this poor, demented creature interfere with the consummation of this union. Possibly the music and festivities attracted her from the street. Such things are not at all infrequent in large cities like this."

Blanche Davenant heard this speech, but she was powerless to move. Standing like one petrified with fear, or fright, she gazed at the window through which Martha Sillingsby had disappeared. Colonel Davenant laid his hand upon her shoulder, and said, kindly:

"Are you willing to have the ceremony proceed, Blanche?"

She started, and falling upon his breast, exclaimed:

"Oh, no, papa! Not to-night—not to-night."

She shuddered, as with ague, and he, tightening his arm about her waist, answered:

"Have courage, darling. It shall be as you say." Then, turning to the assembled guests, he said: "My friends, this unfortunate little episode has almost distracted Miss Blanche, and the marriage will, in consequence, be postponed."

"But, colonel—" interrupted Mark.

"Not a word, sir. The colonel is perfectly right, and I admire his discretion." These were the first words Gabriel Blanchard had uttered since Martha's appearance, and from his severe manner, and the decision that was in his voice, it was very clear that he did not feel that his nephew was altogether blameless for the interruption.

"Come, my child," whispered Colonel Davenant, in his daughter's ear, "let us go up-stairs."

They were moving away, when Mark Blanchard grasped the hand of his affianced, and said:

"I shall come to-morrow and see you—may not?"

"Yes," she faintly replied.

"Good-night!"

"Good-by," she answered, and was gone.

There was a great deal of whispering and gossip among the fashionable throng as it slowly dispersed, and all the next day there was little else discussed in the higher circles of society in the populous Crescent City.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MISSING LINK.

THE Brazos was the third day out from Vera Cruz, and the weather was, and had been, mild and beautiful. The sun was dropping slowly into the distant waves to the westward, and the warm breath of the dying day came over the waters from the south in fitful puffs. The whole sky was aglow with a scarlet beauty which was reflected in the clear waters of the Gulf, tipping the billows with fringes of crimson, and striking the wide-spread sails of the Brazos with a flood of light so dazzling as to make them appear almost transparent.

On the deck walked Graham Cecil and Robert Maynard, engaged in earnest conversation. At length the former said:

"I will call Dr. Gibson, and ask him his opinion of her."

"I wish you would," answered the old man. "I am exceedingly anxious, as you may well guess. I have scarce slept a whole hour since I have been aboard. To tell you the truth, I have watched by her bedside every night while she slept."

"This is too much. You must exercise more care, or your health will give way. But stay—here comes the doctor."

The person who advanced, and acknowledged this title, was a large, heavily-built man of thirty-five, or thereabouts. His face was rosy with the hue of perfect health; his eyes were large, bright and blue, and his chin and upper lip were covered with a wealth of rippling brownish beard, which made him look positively handsome. He was an American physician of means, whose home was in Mississippi, but who had been traveling in Mexico, partly for pleasure and partly on business. He had made the acquaintance of Major Cecil in Monterey, and they had arranged to travel in company as far as Galveston. When, however, Graham Cecil brought Tillie Blanchard and her father aboard the Brazos, Doctor Gibson volunteered at once to take the invalid under his care, feeling confident that he could soon restore her to reason.

She seemed to like him from the start, and submitted to his treatment with a childlike obedience. "All she needs is rest and quiet," he said, after the first day, and now, on the third, she was able to talk quite rationally about many things, although, when her mind rested on her husband, she grew wild, and "wanted to die, too," as she expressed it.

Dr. Gibson knew the query that was upon Graham Cecil's tongue, as he took the hand of the latter;

and, before it could be put into words, the doctor said, in his light, easy way:

"Anxious about my patient, eh?"

"Yes, indeed; very anxious," replied the old man.

"Well, she ain't going to die."

"But her reason?"

"Will be as sound as yours before we reach Galveston."

"Do you really think so?" put in Major Cecil, wringing the doctor's hand.

"Do I think so? Yes—I more than think so—I know so."

"But, doctor, this cure is so sudden," said Cecil.

"Well?"

"Well—of course you ought to know, but really, I was under the impression that it took a long and wearisome course of treatment to effect a cure in such cases."

"In what cases?"

"Well, in cases of insanity."

"That depends altogether on the nature of the disease which produced mental aberration. This has been the result of a shock—a sudden, terrible nervous shock. It is rare, in such cases, for the reason to be permanently disordered. It is the easiest of all cases to cure. Would you believe it?—my patient and I have just had a long and very sensible chat."

"Are you serious, doctor?"

"Never more so in my life."

"Thank God!" was the fervid exclamation of Robert Maynard, as he clasped Dr. Gibson's hand, and then, hastily dropping it, he rushed toward the companionway.

"Where is he going?" asked the doctor.

"To see his daughter, I presume," answered Cecil.

"Oh, he must not do that. He will undo all I have done, if he disturbs her now."

He called the old man back, and proceeded to inform him of the necessity there was for quiet in the sick-chamber, and that, for a day or two yet, it was necessary that he himself should have sole charge of her.

"You see, she is very weak yet, and needs a great deal of care and attention. The stewardess and I will manage this business nicely, if you will only permit us."

Reluctantly the old gentleman consented, saying by way of apology:

"You see, gentlemen, it's pretty hard to be separated again, even for four or five days."

After an hour upon deck, the three separated, Major Cecil going to his state-room, the doctor to his patient, while Robert Maynard continued to walk the deck.

Presently he was joined by Captain Broderick, who was familiarly called "The Skipper of the Brazos."

"Well, sir," he said, "are you prepared for a little blow?"

"A blow?"

"Yes—a regular sou'easter."

"I can't say that I am. You surely don't anticipate a storm, captain?"

"Well, I can't say I anticipate, but that warm puff of wind smells bad, that's all."

"Smells bad?"

"Not exactly; but that's a word of ours which serves to mean that there is something ugly in the wind. Were you never in a blow?"

"Not at sea, sir," replied Maynard, lifting his cap and permitting the warm breeze to lift his gray locks. "I have experienced considerable tough weather on the Cumberland, though."

Captain Broderick laughed a dry laugh, and said:

"I am of the opinion you have never seen any thing to equal a blow in the Gulf. Why, my dear sir, I have almost seen the keel of the Brazos; and the night the Creole Belle went down under my feet, I never expected to see the old Lone Star State again. I tell you, my friend, that was a nipper! But I didn't go under. Suppose the time for passing in my chips hadn't come yet."

"How did you escape?"

"Why, you see, after all the passengers had left the old Belle but two, and there was no person about but Gils Rye, my first mate, I took a long look around the deck. You mayn't want to believe me, but it's true as preaching, I never felt so bad in my life as I did then. It seemed so familiar, the old craft did, and we had known each other *so long*; had seen sunshine and tempest together; had been in mighty tough places, too, that I began to recognize every plank and ratlin as an old chum, and, by gracious me, sir, I forgot the Belle was a-going to the bottom for a minute, and might have forgotten altogether, only for an old man who stood close by, and who was one of the passengers I spoke of. Says he, 'Captain, she's going, and we'd better be trying to save ourselves, afore it's too late.' With that, I looked around, and saw that she was settling astern, awful fast! Wiping my eyes—for there were tears in 'em for the poor old Belle—I ordered a small raft we had fixed up to be launched. Five minutes after we were all aboard, and in ten minutes more I saw the last spar of the Creole Belle go under."

The seaman heaved a deep sigh, as if the memory of the Creole Belle was very sad to him yet; and, turning to Maynard, he continued:

"You think it sorter odd to hear a fellow talk that way about a craft, don't you?"

"Yes, rather odd. But how did you come out on the raft?"

"You mean how did we reach shore?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, we were three whole days a-logging about there, and our provisions had all gone, and hunger and thirst was doing their worst for us. Just

before daylight, on the third night, that old man what had told me to hurry off the Belle crept up to me, and said, in a sorter whisper like: 'Captain, I don't think I can hold out much longer; I'm pretty much used up, but I want to tell you something before I go, so that you can, if you get to land, do me a great service. Well,' said I, 'spin your yarn, and if I can assist you in any way, I'll do it.'

"Was it stormy then?" asked Maynard.

"No, the sea was as calm as a sleeping baby. Perhaps you wouldn't care for hearing that old fellow's story, would you?"

"Yes, if you don't consider it too much trouble to tell it."

"I never thinks anything a trouble."

"Go on, then."

"It's a good many years ago, but I remember it just as well as if it was last night." Here the old sailor rubbed his face with his hand, looked complacently at his companion, and proceeded: "Captain, he said, 'you'll find, in my breast pocket, a document, which is a will. I want you, when I am dead, to take that will out, and, if you ever get ashore again, I want you to go to New Orleans, and have it opened, and read, and fixed up.'"

"Was that all he said?"

"Bless your eyes! no."

"Proceed, then—I am anxious to learn the sequel."

"Said he, 'My name is Gabriel Blanchard, and I—'"

Maynard started violently, and, grasping Captain Broderick tightly by the arm, he said:

"Did you say his name was Blanchard—Gabriel Blanchard?"

"Now, keep cool, will you? What on earth do you mean by grabbing a fellow that way?"

"For God's sake tell me! Did he say his name was Gabriel Blanchard?"

"Didn't I say so?"

"Yes—yes! Go on!"

"You won't get excited?"

"No—go on!"

"Well, you see, one crazy person's enough to have on board at one time."

"But the story?" interrupted Maynard. "What did he say, and what became of him? Was he lost?"

"One question at a time, if you please. No, he was not lost—we were picked up by the 'Henrietta,' of Mobile, shortly after daylight. But, as I was saying, he told me his name was Gabriel Blanchard, and that he had killed a man in a duel, and that man's widow's name was Sybil Mayning, or some such name."

"Yes, yes! Sybil Maynard, my wife!"

The old captain pushed back his hat, and looked closely into Maynard's face.

"You're sure you're not going crazy are you?" he said, at length.

"As sane as you are. My wife is Sybil Maynard, daughter of Adam Grainer, and that man of whom you are now speaking was once a lover of hers, and a bitter, bitter enemy of mine."

"I begin to see through it now," said the captain, drawing a long breath and whistling. "You're the chap, then, as he said he killed?"

"Yes."

"But you're not dead. How does that come?"

"Well, I fell wounded—it was thought mortally—and for five months I lay hovering between the grave and life. It was the first duel I ever fought, and I tell you, captain, it was the last. But what became of Gabriel Blanchard?"

"As I said, we all were picked up and carried to Mobile. I've heard he lives at New Orleans, and is rich. I never got any hands on that will, though."

Maynard was walking away, with his hands to his face, trying to think what had become of Gabriel Blanchard, and what he meant by sending his will to his wife, when, all at once, a thought struck him: might not Mark Blanchard be the son of his ancient enemy? This was a terrible thought, and it is needless to say it intensified the anguish that was tugging at his heart-strings.

Captain Broderick was puzzled at the abstracted manner of his friend, and, after watching him a few moments, he turned away, saying to himself, as he went:

"Well, this sounds like an old-fashioned novel!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A NIGHT OF DANGER.

THREE hours after Captain Broderick and Robert Maynard parted, the storm which had been threatening so long burst forth in a fury so wild, so terrible, as to appall even the stoutest heart on board the Brazos. The heavens all at once became an inky black; the wind shrieked among the rigging, and wailed over the water like the voice of a spectral legion, while the waves threw their white heads high in the air, and lashed themselves until the yeasty foam lay thick upon the deck where Captain Broderick stood.

Although not an inch of canvas was spread, the Brazos was groaning and creaking, as each heavy sea struck her sides, and her commander, with head bowed and teeth set firmly, cried out to the man at the wheel:

"Keep her before the wind, Max—keep her well before the wind!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" was the response, but it was the last ever uttered by Max Clay, for the next instant a huge wave broke over the tossing vessel, and the poor helmsman found a grave in the coral beds, a hundred fathoms down.

In an instant Captain Broderick stood like a figure of iron at the wheel, and, shouting out, "Bring a rope here, and make me fas' my hearties; the old craft is good for the voyage!" he inspired the terror

stricken crew with some of his own courage, and right speedily was he obeyed.

While this was going on above, Dr. Gibson sat in the cabin below, trying to calm Tillie, while her father and Graham Cecil stood by, pale and frightened.

Tillie was sane enough now, and understood the fearful nature of her position keenly, although she was not wholly free from the influence Dr. Gibson had exerted over her during those days in which her reason had been absent.

She regarded him with a sort of reverential homage, and he repaid it with the most devout tenderness and respect.

"Oh, doctor!" she exclaimed, "the ship is going down."

He did not answer immediately, but, pale as a ghost, he waited for an instant in terrible suspense. There was a crashing of timbers overhead; the foremast had snapped off close to the deck, and it yet remained a matter of uncertainty whether the Brazos could manage to ride the waves a moment longer or not.

"Cut the rigging and let her overboard!" They knew it was the voice of Captain Broderick, for no other voice could have made itself heard above the roar of the tempest.

A moment more and Doctor Gibson said, in reply to Tillie:

"All's safe now. They have got rid of the broken mast."

"And you think we will reach shore?"

"Certainly."

"You are not deceiving me?"

He looked at her keenly, and she blushed, and replied:

"I don't mean that. But, are you quite sure the danger is over?"

"The danger is by no means over, but I think the storm has spent its force. If you notice, the wind is not so violent as before."

"I think I do notice a change."

"Storms in this latitude rise very rapidly and are soon over," put in Cecil.

Tillie turned around, quickly. "Why, Mr. Cecil," she exclaimed, "and papa! I did not see you before."

Maynard came forward, hastily, and was about to grasp his daughter in his arms, when Doctor Gibson motioned him to be quiet, and whispered: "Don't excite her now. You must not speak of the past—for your life!"

"We have been trying to keep as quiet as possible," remarked Major Cecil. "The storm is noise enough without your father or I adding to the clatter."

Robert Maynard stood silent, with all his love for his child in his eyes, and contented himself with laying his hand gently—oh, so gently—upon her head, while Doctor Gibson and Cecil talked about tropical adventures as if there was neither storm nor danger threatening them.

There could be no mistaking the fact, that the storm was rapidly subsiding. The wind only came now in fugitive blasts, and already a rift in the clouds showed where the stars glittered in the sky beyond.

The keen eye of Doctor Gibson was quick to notice this through the small cabin-window, and, tapping Tillie on the shoulder, he said, triumphantly:

"Don't you see the stars there?"

She followed the direction of his finger.

"Yes."

"Did I not tell you the storm could not last much longer?"

"Yes."

"You see, now, I have not deceived you in any particular; therefore, when I told you awhile ago that your husband was not dead, but was waiting for you in New Orleans, you should have believed me at once."

She turned around and gazed calmly into his face, and, while the tears gathered in her eyes, said:

"Doctor Gibson, I am as sane as you are! I realize my painful condition fully! I know my husband is a base man, and that he does not now, never did, love me as I loved him."

"My poor girl," answered the doctor, feelingly, "I'm glad to hear you utter those words. For the last few hours your brain has been sorely tried; it has now passed the crucial test, and I am glad to be able to restore you to your father as sane as you were before this great calamity fell upon you."

"My daughter! my poor! poor! child!"

These were Robert Maynard's words as he clasped Tillie to his breast, and pillow'd her head there, pretty much in the style he was wont to do years before.

"Oh, darling, your mother will be so glad to see you again!"

"And I'm so impatient to get home! I shall never, never leave you again."

"And you will not go back to this man—your husband I mean?" asked Doctor Gibson.

She shook her head sadly, and said:

"No; my love for him is buried in that imaginary grave in Vera Cruz. I don't want to ever see him again."

"I am proud to hear you say so," said Doctor Gibson, warmly. "You would not be true to yourself were you to pursue a less independent course."

"Beg pardon," exclaimed Captain Broderick, entering the cabin, and shaking the water off his overcoat, "but, I thought I might as well tell you that we've lost every stick that would hold a yard of canvas, and that we are now at the mercy of the waves."

"Do you mean by this that there is danger of the vessel sinking?" asked Cecil, rather excitedly.

"Oh, no. The masts are gone simply."

"And this will—"

"Keep us out, God knows how long."

"Are we likely to suffer for anything, captain?"

asked Doctor Gibson.

"What do you mean, doctor?"

"I mean, have you provisions enough to last for several days longer than the regular voyage?"

"Well, I don't exactly know; in fact, can't tell until morning. We have plenty if the storm has not damaged our larder. But, Lord bless your soul, sir! that 'ere storm left us like a shorn sheep. The Brazos is nothing but a hulk."

"But, we are in the track of a good many vessels, are we not?" chimed in Maynard. "Is there not a likelihood of being picked up to-morrow?"

"Yes, we might," replied Captain Broderick; "and then again we mightn't. If it wasn't for the little woman there I wouldn't care a snap. Men are tough and can stand a good deal of inconvenience, but ladies are sort of tender, and I do hate to see women inconvenienced!"

"You must not fear for me," answered Tillie. "God is above us all; he will provide for those who trust in him."

The old sailor looked at the speaker, and, doffing his old tarpaulin, stood as if in the presence of a saint. He had never before thought of trusting in God, in that way.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WAITING AND WATCHING.

THE sun arose round and red out of the waters of the Gulf on the following morning, and looked upon the deck of the Brazos, and over the wide expanse of limpid, liquid beauty as if pleased with the reflection of its sunbeams, and surprised at the change a night had wrought in the appearance of the barque.

There were no tapering spars; no bellied canvas; no network of rigging to catch the glow of the fresh rays; but, bald and black, the Brazos lay like an ugly blot on the face of the quivering wavelets. There was not a breath of air, not a ripple; but, still and silent was the scene as if the pulse of ocean had been forever quieted by the feverish tempest of the previous night. Captain Roderick stood amidships, telescope in hand, scanning the horizon, while the watch on the deck lay upon the forecastle, talking about the danger of the night, and speculating upon the chances of being picked up.

"We have not even material enough to rig a jury-mast," said one, "and per'aps we've only been saved from drowning to starve to death."

"For my part, I'd rather have went overboard with poor Max Clay, last night, than to sit here and waste away," said another.

"Not a speck in sight, my boys," said Captain Broderick. "Not a single speck."

"And that's purty bad for us, cap'en," put in an old seaman, "since it's been discovered that most of everything in the pantry and store-room is spoiled."

"Is that so, Jamison?" asked the captain. "Have you searched carefully?"

"Yes, sir, I've s'arched."

"And found nothing fit to eat?"

"Well, nothing wuth naming."

"Did you find any thing?"

"A little salt junk, and a few biscuits."

"Is that all?"

"Every morsel."

"Sure?"

"As I am a liven' man."

Captain Broderick drew in a long breath, and then glanced around at the faces that looked up for encouragement from him. At length he said, quite solemnly:

"You've mostly knowed me for a long time, boys, haven't you?"

"Ay! ay! sir," was the response.

"I've always treated you kind of right, hav'n't I?"

"Yes, fair and square," answered Jamison. "I can speak for the hull crew."

"I never took advantage of one of you?"

"No, sir, that you didn't."

"Never asked you to do a thing I wouldn't have done myself?"

"Don't think you ever did."

"Then, I am entitled to a favor from you, boys, now."

"I think so, cap'en; go on."

"Well now, look here," and as Broderick spoke he glanced searchingly around at the inquiring faces of his dozen seamen. "I don't want one of you boys to touch a biscuit, nor a piece of that pork, until these 'ere parties as are passengers get a show at them; especially that 'ere girl. I know none of it'll cross my lips."

"What do you say, boys? Will we stand by the old skipper now that he hasn't a mast left?" exclaimed Jamison, facing the men.

This allusion to the condition of the Brazos reached the heart of every man present, and a shout went up from every throat, that rung out over the waves. Captain Broderick understood that language so well that the tears started to his eyes, and he said:

"Spoken like men; and boys, I tell you, now, your captain's proud of you."

The long day wore toward its close. The heat had been very oppressive, and the breakers of fresh water had been smashed to atoms during the storm, so that thirst and hunger added not a little to the length of the slow-paced hours.

But now the sun was sinking in the west and the cool breeze which usually accompanies sunset in those latitudes was fanning the parched deck and kissing the white brow of Tillie, who sat at the stern talking to Dr. Gibson.

"How very calm and silent the sea is," she remarked, after a pause.

"Yes," was the response, "we can now fairly appreciate those lines of Coleridge: 'A painted ship upon a painted ocean,' but I have a presentiment that this will not last long."

"Indeed! You are not a fatalist, are you?"

"Well, I can't say as to that. There was a time when I thought men made their own destiny, but within the last few days I think fate has a great deal more to do with our lives than we are willing to confess, at all times."

She looked out over the still water at the sinking sun a moment, and then said:

"Fate weaves the mottled web of life, and hence we get good and evil together."

"Yes, and in some lives, fate cruelly weaves more of the latter than the former," answered the doctor.

"In all, I think," replied Lillie. "My life has known more of sorrow than joy. One great calamity is sufficient to eclipse the pleasure of years."

"Yes; but, we recover from the greatest shocks very rapidly," said Doctor Gibson. "Were it otherwise, life would be both unprofitable and unbearable."

They talked thus for hours, and hours, and it was not until the moon began to light up the eastern sky with its soft radiance that they joined Robert Maynard and Major Cecil in the little cabin.

"Well, there is no sign of sail yet," said the doctor, addressing Cecil.

"Fate is against us, I suppose. Were I less anxious to reach New Orleans, we would doubtless be more fortunate."

Doctor Gibson and Lillie exchanged glances, and Robert Maynard said:

"Let us hope that to-morrow will bring relief."

The next day the crew of the Brazos suffered keenly. The pangs of hunger are at all times terrible, but to be athirst in mid-ocean is at once tantalizing and fearful.

"Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink."

A small glass of water was divided between the passengers, but, on the motion of Doctor Gibson, warmly seconded by Cecil, it was reserved for Lillie.

She was wholly unaware of this, and when she was told to be careful of the liquid, as there was very little more, she had no idea that the last drop had already been reached.

There was no sign of discontent among that slowly starving crew, however; but, hopeful and patient, they walked the deck, straining their eyes in all directions for a sail.

On the morning of the third day Bill Joyce, an old sailor, came to Captain Broderick and said:

"Cap'n, I'd like to say a good-by to you."

"Good-by, Bill! Why, what on earth do you mean?"

"Well, cap'n, I mean as how I can't stand this any longer."

"And what do you propose?"

"Well, you see," and here he dropped his voice to a hoarse whisper, "I'm goin' overboard."

"Going overboard?"

"Yes, sir. Into the sea."

"What, you ain't going to commit suicide?" exclaimed Captain Broderick, a look of incredulity upon his face.

"That's the rough name for it, cap'n. But, you see, it ain't that in this 'ere case, by a good 'eal. Now, what's the use in me suffering along here for a day or two more, and then die at last? Better put an end to it now, and save trouble. 'Sides, I have nobody much to care for me now."

"Bill Joyce, you mustn't think of such a thing. I've eat nothing for twenty-four hours, but I can hold out for some time yet."

"But, what's the use?"

"Why, man, we may be taken up at any time!"

"A sail! A sail!" exclaimed Doctor Gibson, who stood at the stern with Lillie and her father.

"Where? Where?" exclaimed a chorus of voices.

"To the south-west," answered the doctor.

Captain Broderick leaped high in the air, and exclaimed:

"Thank God, boys! No, no, not a cheer! Thank God, every man, in his own heart."

And every man did thank God in his heart, and many a lip moved in prayer.

Nearer and nearer came the sail, until, finally, a boat put off from the approaching ship and came directly toward the Brazos.

"Hello! what barque is that?" came from a man in the boat.

"The Brazos, of Galveston," shouted Broderick.

"What vessel is that?"

"The Peri, of New Orleans, bound for that port," was the reply.

An hour after the entire crew and passengers were transferred to the Peri, and the Brazos was lashed tightly alongside.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

SILAS NORMAN was seated in the parlor of the old St. Louis hotel. He was very grave, and even solemn-looking. He had heard bad news and was very much troubled. There were a great many persons in the apartment; some reading; others chatting and laughing, while, through the open doors of the ladies' parlor, came the soft voice of the viola mingled with the round, ripe music of a woman's voice. It was an old refrain; full of pathos and melody, and touched the heart of Silas Norman, sitting there in the gloomiest corner, beating a tattoo

upon the table at his elbow, and all the while muttering to himself:

"Ay; home is a sweet place, sure enough, but how few ever knew the delights of such a place! I did, though; but, God bless me! that's so many years ago that I can hardly remember it. Poor Letitia! I made her miserable, too. Ah! if I hadn't done that one thing, I would have little to regret now. Hump! and I expected that girl to love me as if I was her own real father. But it wasn't according to nature, I suppose. I was such a fool, though, to go and tell Bradley Turner that she wasn't my child, and about that little Missouri affair, too. Pshaw! I could pound myself for it now. But what's the use? Bradley's on the pious now, and Mangy is as good a girl as I tried to make her. If there's any thing I am glad of now, it is that I didn't carry out my first intention and make her a real bad one. Ah, these reminiscences!"

He got up, yawned, swung his heavy cane back and forward a few times, and then walked slowly down the great, broad stairway and into the bar-room. Arrived there, he glanced into a gilded mirror behind the bar, readjusted his colored necktie, and sauntered toward the street door.

As he passed the row of fluted columns, he noticed an odd looking man leaning against one of them. He was a small, dapper gentleman, dressed in a white linen suit, and wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat.

Silas thought he had seen the face before. There was something peculiar about the deep-set, gray eyes and retreating chin, that reminded him of a personage whom he had met years before.

He did not stop, however, to scan the features closely, and was about to step into the street when the strange-looking little man tapped him on the shoulder, and said:

"Good-evening, sir!"

If Silas had been stung by an adder, he could not have started more violently, and turning, fiercely, upon the stranger, he replied:

"Well! What do you want?"

"I didn't ask any thing, did I?"

"Why did you stop me, then?"

"I said good-evening. Does nobody ever stop you who don't want any thing, eh?"

"How dare you speak to me, sir?" Silas was becoming furious.

"Dare?"

"Yes, sir—dare."

"That's rough talk."

"Yes, and I'll make it rough work, too, if you are not careful."

"It would not be the first rough work you have done, I guess." The little man looked up at Silas and winked slyly.

"What do you mean?" Silas was a little cowed now.

"I mean *Missouri!*" answered the stranger, and no sooner had he the words out of his mouth than he was clutched by the throat by Silas and violently thrown to the ground.

The latter then tried to run away, but, ere he could move, two men leaped out of the darkness, and in a trice Silas Norman was securely handcuffed.

The little man scrambled to his feet at once, and exclaimed, triumphantly: "You didn't make it, eh?"

"Who are you?" gasped the prisoner.

"Only Adam Pomfret, of Jefferson City, Missouri. You ought to remember me well enough, John Ramsey. I am the fellow who arrested you once, for forgery, and had you cooped. If you hadn't taken French leave in the way you did, and stayed in your cell for fifteen years, instead of breaking up the furniture the State gave you and running off to Louisiana, I wouldn't have come down here. You see, you have twelve years to serve yet. Of course you remember."

This was said in a serio-comic way, that was extremely tantalizing to the prisoner, and, in his rage, he wrung the manacles almost asunder.

"You needn't try that game, Jack," put in the little detective. "We had them made on purpose for you. Now, wasn't it kind of us?"

"Curse you! I wish my hands were loose; I'd spill your brains on this pavement," said he whom we have hitherto known as Silas Norman, but whom we may as well call by his proper cognomen at once, John Ramsey.

"Suppose you would, and I feel much obliged to you; I do, upon my conscience. You see, I can afford to swear by my conscience. I have plenty, which I'm sorry I can't say for you, Jack."

By this time the station-house was reached, and, after the usual formalities had been gone through with, John Ramsey found himself behind the bars of a prison once more.

On the following evening he was to be taken up to his old quarters in Missouri, there to remain twelve long, dreary years.

It was a bitter night he spent on the cold flags, alone with his thoughts, and only disturbed now and then by the maudlin pleasantry of a parcel of unfortunate creatures in the next cell.

His whole past life came back to him, and he saw each successive event as plainly as if his memory had the power of the photographer. He saw a beautiful girl whom he once loved, standing by the side of a tall, brave youth who was very dear to her. There was a long, grassy lane, with a pretty little church at the end, and the air was full of the music of Sabbath bells.

He dashed the tears from his eyes, and saw again a wedding; heard the jingle of wedding-bells; the gleeful congratulations, and felt the old heart pang he experienced on that night now linked with the dreaming long ago.

It was near morning when he rattled his cell-door, and cried out:

"Ho, jailer! Ho, there!"

"Well," answered the drowsy turnkey, moping in. "I want you to send to Dauphine street, in the morning, for a man named Bradley Turner. I have a confession I want to make to him."

"All right. What hour do ye want him?"

"About eight o'clock. You'll find him easily about that hour."

"All right."

The door closed with a bang, and the turnkey resumed his chair in the front room, while the prisoner stretched himself upon the flags and tried in vain to sleep.

CHAPTER XX.

A REVELATION.

It was a misty, foggy morning, and a few persons were abroad in the streets when Magdalean Norman and Bradley Turner left the house in Dauphine street, and started for the Second District Police Station. It was quite a long walk, but Magdalean felt so anxious to learn what her "sometime" father had to say to her, and, withal, was so distressed at his misfortune, that she did not feel the fatigue at all, and was rather surprised when Bradley stopped before the dingy prison and said:

"Well, here we are."

"Is this the police station?" asked the girl. "Yes, this is the place. Just step in, please, and we'll see what poor Silas has got to say."

It was an ugly, rough place, sure enough; and to Magdalean Norman it brought a keen feeling of gloom and heartache. She had a very tender heart she now discovered for the first time; and, whatever her feelings toward Silas formerly were, she experienced nothing but the keenest pity for him now.

"Can we see the prisoner, Silas Norman?" asked Bradley.

"Don't think you can see any Silas Norman," answered the turnkey.

"Why not?"

"Well, for a good and sufficient reason."

"What reason?"

"There ain't no such man here."

"Has he been liberated, then?" Bradley asked, excitedly.

"Well, no," with a yawn, "I guess not, seeing that no person has gotten out yet."

"Was there not a man arrested last night for forgery done in Missouri?" put in Magdalean.

"Yes."

"Well, that's the man, you blockhead," blurted out Bradley, disgusted with what he considered the stupidity of the turnkey.

"Well, I guess that ain't the man, by a jugful," retorted the turnkey. "The man as done *that* forgery, and is in that cell there, might have called himself Silas Norman, but his real name is nothing but plain Jack Ramsey."

"It don't matter particularly what his name is," interrupted Magdalean; "let us see him, please."

"Yes ma'am, I will," replied the turnkey, with an admiring glance at the stately beauty of the girl.

He unlocked the door at once, and ushered the visitors into a small corridor that ran in front of the rows of cells.

"Oh, my!" was the exclamation that burst from the girl's lips, as she caught sight of John Ramsey's woe-begone features, and then she began to cry.

The girl's emotion touched the prisoner to the quick, and for a moment he could not speak. Then he only managed to say, in something very little louder than a whisper:

"Don't pity me, Mangy; don't pity me. I'm not worth a tear from you. I've injured you too deeply for you to give me any sympathy."

Neither spoke for a while, and the silence was becoming awkward, when Bradley said:

"Si, old boy, I'm sorry for you."

He reached out his hand, and the prisoner clutched it through the bars and never spoke a word. Finally the prisoner said, with an effort:

"I sent for you, Mangy, to tell you a secret."

The girl started, and replied:

"Go on."

"Well, then, to be brief, I ain't your father at all!"

"I had long ago suspected that," answered Magdalean; "but tell me, who is?"

"Douglas Houghton, a rich New York merchant, who, when I heard from him last, had retired from business and was living in a palatial house on the Hudson."

"And my mother?" gasped Magdalean.

"Was Lucy Wren before her marriage with Doug Houghton. She, too, is still living. You were the first born of that marriage, and I, jealous of your father's success in winning Lucy, abducted you when you were but three years old. It was a terrible revenge, but I am sorry for it now, and have been for a good many years."

This revelation, coming so suddenly, and being in its nature so terrible, almost overcame Magdalean, and feeling herself becoming weak, she said turning to Bradley:

"I'm very sick; I'm afraid I'm going to faint."

She tottered, and would have fallen had not Turner caught her in his arms.

A half an hour after, she was at her home, in Dauphine street, and was so far recovered as to be able to realize the full import of that strange story she had just listened to.

"And so, Magdalean, you are a grand lady," said Bradley, after a long pause, and with a tinge of sadness in his voice.

She looked across the table at him, and, with a woman's quick wit, divined at once his feelings.

"You are not sorry, Bradley, surely?"

"No; but—"

"But what?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, Magdalean, it appears to me I'd rather have you just as you were."

"Why so?"

"Well, you see, a grand lady is a good piece out of Bradley Turner's line; and, while I'm glad, for your sake, that better days have come to you, I know it ain't best for me."

"Do you mean that a bit of good fortune could make me forget you?"

He did not answer.

"Why, Bradley Turner, I didn't think I ever did any thing to make you think meanly of me," she added, after a little while.

"Nor you never did," he replied, with an emphasis on the last word.

"Then, why do you think I will now forget you—you, who picked me up out of the streets—you, who provided me with a good home—you, who respected my lonely position in the world, and taught me, by your noble example, that there is more good than evil in every heart? Bradley Turner, I'll never, never cease to think of you kindly, tenderly."

There were tears in his eyes as she concluded, and, without uttering a syllable, he put out his arms, and for the first time in her life, Magdalean Houghton pillow'd her head upon a man's bosom.

"God bless you, Magdalean," was all he could say.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OLD LOVE AGAIN.

JUNE roses were blushing red, and summer breezes were softly blowing when Blanche Davenant met Mark Blanchard to make arrangements for a speedy and quiet marriage. There was to be no display on this occasion: only a few friends were to be invited, and it was settled that, immediately after the marriage ceremony, the nuptial party were to leave for Europe. They were going to make an extensive tour of the continent; were going to spend a season at Naples, a few months at Florence, a winter at Rome, and finally an indefinite period at gay and fashionable Paris.

At the instigation of Blanche the utmost exertions had been made to discover the whereabouts of the old hag who had so rudely interrupted the former marriage ceremony but without success.

Of course everybody, including Blanche and her father, believed her story a disagreeable hoax; and, while the former regretted that it was untrue, she felt it to be her duty to keep the promise she had so solemnly made to Mark.

But now, with all the sweet, delicious balm of this lovely June day about her, she could not help wishing that her wedding-day was a decade, instead of a week distant.

"You will never find the days long," said Mark, "when we are once married and off for Europe. You say you liked Baden and Venice when you were but a mere child; but, if these delightful spots were pleasant to you then, what will they be now, when you have the judgment of womanhood to appreciate and enjoy them?"

She was plucking a blush rose to atoms and gazed abstractedly out of the open window.

She only sighed in answer.

He bit his lip with vexation and said: "Blanche, you seem moody and out of spirits to-day."

"Yes," she answered, "I have been thinking."

"About what?"

She shook her head.

"Oh, nothing; only a girl's dream."

"It strikes me you are much given to dreaming of late."

"I was always addicted to it."

"But, may I ask you the subject of your dream?"

"Certainly not."

His eyes were sparkling now, and while his face grew scarlet, he said, very solemnly:

"May I guess?"

"If you will," was the careless reply.

"Graham Cecil!"

She arose to her feet, and, with an offended air, replied:

"No, sir! I wish you a very good-morning."

She looked like an injured queen as she pointed with her index finger to the open doorway and awaited her visitor's departure.

"But, Blanche—" he stammered out.

"Don't compel me to ask you to go," she interrupted. "I am not so low, sir, that I will permit you to insult me."

"I'll come to-morrow and explain," he said, as he moved off.

"Suit yourself, sir," was her answer.

The next instant she heard the gate open and close again, and knowing herself to be alone she hurried up to her chamber. There, casting herself down by the bedside, she cried, aloud:

"Oh! Cecil! Cecil! you will never, never know how dear you are to me."

When she had wept until her head throbbed with pain, she sat down and wrote a long letter to Mark Blanchard, saying that she had never loved him, but did not know until to-day that he was positively hateful to her.

She concluded by saying: "No matter what society may say; no matter what my friends may think of my present course, I am going to be true to my own heart. After saying this much, it is needless, I suppose, to add that I never wish to see you again."

She folded up the letter carefully, and placing it in an envelope, dispatched it by a servant at once to the post-office.

Then, casting herself down on her knees, she prayed, oh, so fervently, for God to bring Graham Cecil back to her, to pardon her for the error she had committed in permitting him to depart; and, finally, to make Mark Blanchard happy and contented with a woman more worthy of him.

"I can not sacrifice myself," she burst out. "I am not good and strong enough to do so, and, whatever evil may grow out of this step, oh, Father in Heaven, visit it on no head but mine!"

She bowed her head until her long hair trailed upon the carpet, and moaned aloud in agony:

"Blanche, my child." It was Colonel Davenant who spoke, as, full of pain and surprise, he lifted his daughter to her feet. "What has happened?" he said, "to cause you such grief? Tell me, darling. Don't be afraid."

She did tell him every thing then, never concealing a word. When she had finished speaking, he said:

"And so you love Major Cecil, and he has confessed that he loves you?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did he tell you this?"

"Last winter, before he left the city."

"Did he ask you to break your engagement with Mark Blanchard?"

"No, sir; he never did. He was too noble for that."

He paused and looked down a moment, as if in deep thought.

"Why was I not informed of this before?"

"Because I had made up my mind to obey you, and therefore I did not think it necessary."

There was another long pause. Then he said:

"You have done well, my child, and I'm very, very sorry, indeed, for urging this union. I have now a piece of news for you. Gabriel Blanchard died an hour ago, leaving the bulk of his fortune to an old sweetheart, once named Sybil Grainer, but who is now Mrs. Maynard. Mark, of course, is liberally provided for. I just left the house of mourning and saw the will in the hands of an attorney.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WILD CAREER.

MARK BLANCHARD stood beside the dead body of his uncle and ground his teeth with rage as he looked down into that upturned face. The features of the dead were sharp and pointed, and there was a purplish hue about the half-parted lips.

"So!" exclaimed Mark; "this is the end of all my expectations? A few paltry thousands—enough to keep me off the street! Oh! I could find it in my heart to bury these knuckles in your old clayey face!" He shook his clenched fist in the face of the dead man, and perhaps would have carried out his threat had not Lemanuel, an old and faithful servant, grasped him at that moment.

"Why, He'b'en bless me, M'r's'r Mark, you am'n't gwine to strike de ole man, is ye?"

The young man turned around fiercely.

"What do you mean, you black villain? How dare you place your hand on me?"

"I know I'se brack, but I'se too white to stan' by an' see dat good, kind ole man striked in de face."

"You dare tell me this?"

"Dar! I dar' any t'ing for poor ma's'r's sake!"

"Then take that for your pains." And, as Mark Blanchard said this, he struck Lemanuel a heavy blow in the temple with the butt-end of a revolver, and the poor, faithful negro, fell back, dead.

The murderer didn't stop to see the result of that blow, but, hastily putting the revolver back in his pocket, he turned on his heel and fled from the house.

An hour after, he was standing in one of the noted gambling hells of St. Charles street, betting recklessly on faro.

The dealer, who knew him well, was surprised at his bad luck; while a knot of lookers-on stood aghast at the huge sums Mark staked and lost in quick succession.

"Blanchard, you are not in luck to-day," said the banker, shuffling the cards.

"No, I should say not; but, I'm going to burst this bank or myself before I leave this house."

"All right, my hearty," was the smiling reply.

"You bet on the ace, eh?"

"Yes."

"And copper, too?"

"Yes."

Dexterously the *suave* dealer handled the little silver box, and then threw out the card.

"You've lost again," said the dealer, raking in the money, while the spectators drew a long breath and gazed in wonder at the desperate gambler.

He never spoke a word, but, taking out a huge roll of bills, laid them down before him.

"What do you bet?" asked the dealer, cool and calm.

"Three thousand dollars."

Even the banker now grew pale, and his fingers trembled nervously as he dealt the cards. There was not the slightest sound to be heard; even the man who stood at the roulette table stopped whirling his ivory ball and came over to Blanchard's side.

"You lose!" came at last from the banker's lips, and the pile of bank-notes were raked over to his side of the table.

"What will you give me for this?" asked Mark, excitedly, taking from the bosom of his shirt a huge diamond pin.

"Well, Blanchard, I'd rather not go any further." "But, you must give a fellow a chance for his money."

"Well, yes, of course. But, luck's been against you, so I don't think you ought to play more just now."

"If I'm willing to play that's none of your business," was the response. "Here, what will you give for this?"

He held up the jewel between his fingers, and its fire flashed as bright as Mark Blanchard's eyes.

"Five hundred dollars."

"Then go on!"

There was another deal, and this time Blanchard won five hundred dollars.

"Do you wish me to deal again?" asked the banker.

"Certainly."

"Very well, sir."

The cards came out slowly, and Mark Blanchard lost *one thousand dollars!*

Just as Mark Blanchard's last dollar disappeared, a man came running in from the street, and plucking Mark by the sleeve, he whispered:

"The police are after you for killing your nigger, Lemanuel. Come with me."

The poor wretch trembled and turned pale; he already saw his end approaching, but he had not the courage to meet it, and so he turned and followed the new-comer as fast as he could.

The crowd who had witnessed Mark's losses, gazed in wonder as they saw the two men run out of the back-door and disappear in a dark alley.

"This way," said the stranger, whom Mark recognized as an old friend; "this way."

They crawled through a long, dark hall, and finally plunged through a small paint-shop and out to Commercial Place.

"Which way now?" asked Mark.

"Up Camp street."

The two men walked rapidly to the corner of Poydras, where Mark stopped and said: "It won't do to pass Lafayette Square. Policemen are there."

"You are right," replied his friend. "Stand here a moment, in the shadow of the Moresque building, and I will get a cab."

He was off in a jiffy, and in a moment more, a carriage rolled around the corner of St. Charles street.

"Get in now, Blanchard, and let him drive you to the swamps. Once there, you can make your escape to the lake, and obtain something to carry you off. Good-by."

Blanchard was in the vehicle and rolling away before his friend had finished speaking.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HUNTED DOWN.

On rattled the carriage, over the flinty pavements; past Lafayette Square, where a half-dozen policemen dozed in the warm sunlight; past Tivoli Circle, where happy children laughed and shouted in gleeful innocence; past long rows of balconied residences; until, at last, the driver put his face down against the front window, and asked:

"How much further do you want to go?"

"What street is this?" inquired Mark, his heart beating wildly.

"This is Austerlitz street. We are outside of the city now. This is Jefferson, and if I take you further, I'll have to ask five dollars more."

"I haven't five dollars, but here, take this."

It was a costly amethyst ring that he shoved up to the greedy driver. "Take me a few squares further, and you can go."

The driver cracked his whip; the fiery grays sprung forward, and Mark Blanchard held his breath in terror. He was an abject coward, after all.

"Marengo street," said the driver, opening the door politely.

Mark leaped out and gazed around him. Off to the left he could see the turbid waters of the Mississippi, rolling onward to the sea; to the right waved an ocean of emerald over leagues of marshy swamps.

Mark turned toward the river.

"I thought you were going through the swamps," said the driver, as he mounted his box and turned his horses' heads in the direction of the city.

"No, I guess I'll cross the river," replied Mark, waving the fellow an adieu.

"Hope you'll get through all right, old fellow," were the last words of the Jehu; then he dashed off, and was soon lost to view.

There were not many houses in the neighborhood, and they were scattered over a great deal of territory—a flat, almost treeless plain.

When the sound of the carriage-wheels died away, and nothing disturbed the hush of the sultry afternoon but the crowing of a few loud-voiced fowls, Mark turned his steps from the river and walked rapidly toward the swamps.

"It wouldn't do to trust that fellow," he said to himself. "Nothing like discretion, where it is a question of life and death."

With rapid strides he made for the tall waving willows which grew up out of the sedgy soil, and, in less than ten minutes, he was screened from view.

Crouching down in the darkness, his feet immersed in the pasty black mud, from which a greenish current oozed everywhere, he tried to collect his thoughts and endeavored to form some plan of escape.

The bells of the distant city came to him like the voice of the past, and the stillness and dampness

about him were suggestive of the grave to which he had just sent poor Lemanuel.

Having rested himself, he deliberately stripped off his coat and vest, for they caught in the briars as he passed, and, still stooping, he pushed onward.

It was a difficult route; the brambles scratched his face, and the thorns buried their points in his quivering flesh. Now he plunged waist-deep in a pool of stagnant water, and anon he started back as some foul carrion-bird fluttered up from the reeds, and screaming, flew away.

Even the cries of those birds frightened him now, and whenever he came across them he paused with bated breath and tried to leave them undisturbed. Sometimes he was successful, but at others the ugly things would detect the intruder, and, filling his ears with hideous screams, dart off.

"Curse the black devils!" he would exclaim, grinding his teeth with rage; "they will give the alarm."

"Finally, the twilight that ever reigns in the depths of the swamps, became darker and heavier, and night crept slowly down upon the wretched fugitive.

He did not stop, however; he could not think of passing a night in that fearful place; and, although weak and fatigued, he pressed on.

The fire-flies blazed their transient gleams in his face; and then the darkness grew blacker than before. His mouth was parched and feverish, but there was not a drop of water fit to drink anywhere; his head ached terribly; his eyes were burning up.

"Oh, God! I can't stand this!" he exclaimed, clasping his bloody hands, and trying to look at the calm, star-lit sky above.

Again he staggered forward, and, falling over the root of a dwarfed tree, he lay there for fully half an hour. A light—a strong light flashed through the rank undergrowth. He started in terror and shrunk back. Nearer and nearer it came. He held his breath. He now heard the voices of men. He shrunk back into the slime. A moment passed; it seemed like an age, and then he discovered that the light and the speakers were upon the deck of a sloop sailing down the canal to the basin at the foot of Julia street.

The vessel with its flapping sail went by, and Mark Blanchard struggled to his feet and started desperately forward.

Two hours of toil, and he stood upon the bank of Lake Pontchartrain, not a great distance from the upper landing.

He was a frightful spectacle, blood-stained, grimy, feeble from over-exertion.

A steamboat was lying at the landing with steam up. She would leave for Mobile in a few hours.

"I will go aboard and hide myself," said the fugitive, after a moment's thought.

He drew a long breath, and then slipped into the water, and being an expert swimmer he soon reached the steamer.

Grasping the guards he rested himself awhile, and then dragged himself onto the deck. As he did so, a policeman leaped from the engine-room and seized him by the throat.

"Let go your hold," gasped Mark.

"Surrender," cried the policeman, leveling a pistol at the head of his prisoner.

"Never!" hissed Blanchard, and, summoning all his strength for one final effort, he wrenched himself free and darted back into the deck-room.

The policeman was in hot pursuit. He could hear his footsteps close behind.

The boat was heavily laden with cotton; an oil lamp stood on a pile of boxes. Mark's eye took in this at a glance. He lifted the lamp and hurled it into a broken and half-open bale. In an instant a wall of fire leaped up between him and his pursuer.

Ding-dong! Ding-dong! clanged the bell.

"Fire!" "Fire!" "Fire!" shouted the crew, and all was confusion and excitement.

Higher and higher leaped the flames, casting a lurid glare far out upon the waters, and the crew and passengers rushed out upon the long pier.

When the smoke-stacks had already fallen in, and the Daisy Dean resembled nothing so much as a glowing cinder, Mark Blanchard appeared upon the outer edge of the fan-tail.

The policeman saw him, and, in a twinkling, two bullets had pierced the head of the poor wretch. His eyes glared an instant, and then he fell forward and was lost forever in the waters of the Lake.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT LAST.

ONE week after the death of Mark Blanchard, Blanche Davenant sat in her little rose-colored boudoir, thinking of the past and wondering if Graham Cecil would come back to her.

"Missa, dar is a gen'leman in de parlo' as wants to see ye."

"A gentleman? Did he not send up his card?" asked Blanche, surprised.

"No, missa; he sed as how you'd knows it wa' him, an' dat he's jest gotten home, an' has no cards."

Blanche got up, glanced in her mirror, shook out the folds of her rich robe, and descended the stairs. Her heart was thumping wildly; she half suspected who the stranger was; and when she pushed open the drawing-room door, and stood face to face with Graham Cecil, she did not faint or exclaim, but simply reached out her hands and managed to say, very low and softly: "Cecil!"

They were very, very happy now; and it was not

until nightfall that Graham Cecil joined Dr. Gibson, Tillie and her father at the St. James Hotel.

Two weeks after Graham Cecil claimed Blanche Davenant for his own.

CHAPTER XXV.

LIGHT ON THE PATH.

It was a beautiful October evening; the stars twinkled in the soft blue of an autumn sky; the forest was all aflame with the glories of the dying year; and the smooth, unruffled current of the Cumberland crept toward the broad Ohio through a landscape so lovely, that it would be difficult to describe.

Close to the water's edge walked Tillie Blanchard and Dr. Gibson. She looked very sweet and womanly in the rich glow of the twilight, and more mature, possibly, than when we saw her last, for five long years have rolled away since then, but more dignified, and I think a trifle handsomer, too.

The twain were talking earnestly as they went, and finally the doctor said:

"Tillie, I have refrained from telling you what has been in my heart these many years, because—well, because I thought perhaps you could not reciprocate my feelings; and, although not naturally a diffident man, I feared a refusal."

Tillie did not speak at once, but continued to pluck to pieces the flower she held in her hand, scattering its bright leaves behind her as she walked on.

He expected a reply, however, and her silence piqued him some. At length he stopped, and turning quickly upon his heel, looked his companion full in the face.

"Tillie, have you no answer for me—have I waited all these years in vain?"

She dropped the flower and gazed earnestly into his face a moment. Then the tears came creeping into the corners of her pretty eyes, one by one, until, in very coyness, she dropped the long fringe-like lashes down and wept.

He could not understand this, and he said, coldly: "Do not weep, Tillie. There is no occasion for tears, I can assure you. I was foolish to expect you to love one whom you have only seen a half-dozen times in five years. I will try to forget this."

She laid her hand upon his arm and exclaimed: "Don't! Oh, Bert Gibson, don't go on in that way. You are killing me with your words."

"I do not mean to reproach you, Tillie. Believe me when I say that I am only sorry that you can not return the love I bear you."

He spoke very solemnly now, and grasped the hand she extended to him. They turned their steps in the direction of Tillie's house now, and when they had walked a short distance, she stopped suddenly, and said:

"Bert Gibson, I have something to say to you—something I thought I never should be able to say again to any man."

He was about to speak but she warned him into silence.

"When I gave my hand to Mark Blanchard I loved him as few men have ever been loved—with a love that did not perish until there was nothing left for it to cling to. You know this. You know how wild, how passionate was my affection for that man. You, too, know how it all ended. You came to me in my darkest hour; when despair had crazed my brain; when I had lost all faith in mankind. You have been good, and kind and noble to me."

"Tillie, I'm sure—"

"No, don't interrupt me. As I have said, you have taught me that all men are *not* bad, and, during these many years, I have worshipped you as my good angel. When you wrote to me that you were coming to Tennessee, on important business, I counted the days and the hours until you came; and, when, last night, you told me you were going away, I cried through the whole night."

She burst into tears again, and Doctor Gibson folded her closely in his arms and whispered:

"After the storm cometh the calm, darling. There are bright days in store for thee yet."

"And, do you think, Bert, you can love me, knowing all you know of my misfortunes?"

"Your misfortunes are not of your own making, darling, and instead of detracting from your virtues, in any way, they have made you, in my eyes at least, sacred."

"And we shall never go back to New Orleans again?"

"If you do not wish to go there, most certainly not."

"Oh, I never do," she said. "I want to live here in Tennessee where my happiest days were spent."

"Then so you shall," he answered.

The snow lay deep on the ground and the branches of the trees were heavy with a wealth of crisp flakes, when Tillie Maynard stood by Bert Gibson's side, and took upon herself the vows of wifehood.

It was a pleasant wedding-party, with plenty of dancing and feasting, and, on the following day, the wedded couple started for Europe on a three-year's tour.

Shortly after Bradley Turner left New Orleans he entered into a real-estate business, from which he realized handsomely, and one year after he married pretty Magdalene Houghton, and is now a prosperous business man in New York city.

Poor, unfortunate Silas Norman, or, as we have learned to call him, Jack Ramsey, died in the Missouri State prison only a few days ago.

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